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# COMUS

BY

JOHN MILTON

*EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY*

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PRINCIPAL ISLAMIA COLLEGE, LAHORE

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Second Edition

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Allahabad

RAM DAYAL AGARWALA

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1917

Price One Rupee

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**ALAHABAD**

**Printed by Mool Chand at the Shivaram Aushadhalaya Press,**

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## INTRODUCTION

### I—LIFE OF MILTON

Only the briefest sketch of Milton's life can be attempted here, but so much is necessary to understand the poem we are to study

Milton's life divides itself into three distinct periods

*I—1608 1639*—the period of preparation, in home, school, college and travel Poetic productions the early poems, including the *Nativity Ode*, *L'Allegro* *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, *Lycidas*

*II—1640 1660*—the period of political controversy Prose works Poetical productions *Sonnets*

*III—1660 1674*—the period of retirement and blindness Poetical productions, the great poems—*Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, *Samson Agonistes*

It will be noticed from this summary that there was a long parenthesis in the life of Milton the poet—a parenthesis which lasted twenty years, the best years of a man's life, in which he produced no poetry but a few sonnets All his main poetical work was done in his youth and his old age, the greatest in his old age It is one of the poems of his youth, (*Comus*), that we are to study

## I—FIRST PERIOD, 1608 1639

As this was Milton's period of training for his great work, we may summarise it under the most important influences that went to make that training up

1. *Home* Milton was born on December 9th, 1608 at the house in Bread St, Cheapside, London, where his father lived over his shop, that bore sign of 'the Spread Eagle' Milton's father was a scrivener (lawyer and lawyer's stationer), and a prosperous London citizen. He came of a good family, and was a man of considerable literary culture and marked musical ability. He was a Puritan but his Puritanism was not that morose and narrow religion with which we become too familiar in the Commonwealth days, for he was interested in all refined intellectual pleasures, and the home atmosphere he created was one of "cheerful godliness"

From this home atmosphere John Milton derived much that was best and most characteristic in him,—his strong, earnest Puritan religion, his love of the beautiful in literature and art, and his well known musical tastes. Of these and other great benefits, Milton was conscious, and shewed his gratitude to his father for them afterwards in his Latin poem "*Ad Patrem*." The fellowship between the two seems to have been very warm.

2. *School* Milton's father evidently recognized very early his son's exceptional ability, and he spared neither money nor trouble to give him a sound education. He engaged an able private tutor for him and sent him to St Paul's School. The boy himself quickly developed



a great eagerness for learning. In his "Second Defence" he tells us, "My father destined me from my infancy to the study of polite literature, which I embraced with such avidity, that from the age of twelve I hardly ever retired from my books before midnight. This proved the first source of injury to my eyes, whose natural weakness was attended with frequent pains in the head, but as all these disadvantages could not repress my ardour for learning, my father took care to have me instructed by various preceptors, both at home and at school."

It was at St. Paul's school that Milton formed his friendship with Charles Diodati, at whose death he composed, in 1639, a grand Latin elegy. And it was during his school days that he porcd over the pages of Spenser, who influenced his later poetry. The school work itself laid the foundation of his sound classical scholarship.

3—*College* Milton went to Christ College, Cambridge, in 1625. He took his B. A. degree in 1628-9, and his M. A. in 1632.

His seven years at the University do not seem to have left much impression on him. He seemed to be out of sympathy with the place. For one thing he had an uncongenial tutor, William Chappell, a narrow High Churchman of the Laudian school, and for another, the education then given at the University was pedantic in the extreme, and aimed at little but the attainment of technical skill in Latin and Greek composition. Milton complains that 'he was dragged from his studies and compelled to employ himself in composing some frivolous

declamation" Writing from College to an old school-fellow of his, he said, "here among us, are hardly one or two that do not flutter off, all unfledged, into theology, having gotten of philology or philosophy scarce so much as a smattering And for the theology, they are content with just what is enough to enable them to patch up a paltry sermon"

Though he kept much to himself and made few friends, he gained the sincere respect of his seniors, and the nickname given him in scorn by his fellow undergraduates, "the lady of Christ's" shows that he had already become noted for that austere chastity and virtuous conduct which marked his whole life The nickname may also have a reference to his personal beauty, which was said to be remarkable

It was during his University career he wrote his first poems—several Latin ones, some small English pieces, probably the first two sonnets, and his ode "*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*"

4 *Self culture* Probably before he had left Cambridge Milton had decided on his great life work He turned from his father's profession with little hesitation, and he finally refused to enter the Church, as his father had desired, because it was already becoming tainted with Laudian beliefs and practices According to the second Sonnet, he had felt, even at the age of twenty-three, the destiny of some great work awaiting him And some words written later in 1641 show what that work had come to be to him. He said, then, that he had "an

inward prompting, which grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after times, as they should not willingly let it die" He had discovered himself to be a poet, and he felt that his great mission in life was to develop his gift to God's glory. Though his great ambition was not fulfilled till the end of his life, in the "Paradise Lost," he never forgot it and this period from 1632-1637 was one of strenuous preparation.

With his father's full sympathy Milton, therefore, took up no profession, but settled for five years in the home at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, to which his father had retired. He spent his time in wide reading and much study, storing his mind with the best of ancient and modern literature. Writing to his friend Diodati at the end of these five years, he says, "you make many inquiries as to what I am about—what I am thinking of? Why, with God's help, of Immortality! Forgive the words, I only whisper in your ear. Yes, I am pluming my wings for a flight."

This time was not, however, entirely one of preparation. In it Milton produced five poems that would have made him immortal even if he had written nothing else. *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, *Arcades* and *Lycidas* were all produced at some time during his seclusion at Horton.

5. *Travel* This period of training was completed by

over a year spent in Italy, the land of poetry and art Milton had already mastered Italian, and during his tour wrote some Italian poems. His tour was broken short, however, for when he was staying at Naples he had news of the political troubles in England, and resolved to return home. "For," he wrote 'I thought it disgraceful, while my fellow countrymen were fighting for liberty, that I should be travelling abroad for pleasure.' He was back in England in 1639 and settled in London, where he tried to proceed with his studies and took some pupils, including two of his nephews. He was now seriously considering the subject and form of the great poem he meant to write, the choice apparently lying between a historical romance (such as the Arthurian legend) or a sacred drama (such as the Fall, or Samson). But all these plans were put aside on the outbreak of the Civil War.

## II SECOND PERIOD 1640-1660

Public affairs had now come to such a pass that every Englishman had to decide which party he would follow—Parliament or King. The Long Parliament met and passed sweeping measures against Charles' despotic government, and impeached and executed his great minister, Strafford. In 1642 the Civil War broke out. Milton was not long in deciding. His Puritan training, and his passionate love of liberty (perhaps the guiding principle of his thought and life), ranged him on the Parliamentary side. He felt it was his duty to give up all his plans for the sacred work of helping

the national cause In his own words , "perceiving that the true way to liberty followed on from these beginnings, inasmuch, also, as I had so prepared myself from my youth that, above all things, I could not be ignorant of what is of Divine and what of human right, I resolved, though I was then meditating certain other matters, to transfer into this all my genius and all the strength of my industry "

There has been much division of opinion as to whether Milton was right in this decision or whether he made a fatal mistake Probably he had no idea that it would cut him off from his beloved poetry for the best twenty years of his life But this is what it actually did On the one hand it is argued that the decision was a fatal error, and that these years given to political controversy were wasted There were hundreds of men in England who could have written political pamphlets there was only one who could write "*Paradise Lost*" It was harnessing Pegasus to a common plough , and the loss to English literature is incalculable On the other hand, it is argued that this experience of actual life and contact with all sorts of men was essential to Milton before he could write a great human poem , and that without this experience and its resulting insight into human nature, the *Paradise Lost* could not have been the great poem that it is Milton himself hints at something like this as seen in his words, "I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrated of his life to write well hereafter in laudable things ought

himself to be a fine poem not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and practice of all that which is praiseworthy" If we adopt this second view we must regard this period of Milton's life as part of the preparation necessary for his great work—*The Paradise Lost*—which could not have been written by a mere student who had no practical knowledge of men and affairs

There is no need to write much of this poetically barren period Apart from the stirring national history of the time, it consists, as far as Milton is concerned, in a long list of political pamphlets written in Latin prose, many of which are of little interest for us now apart from the author

During 1641-2 he wrote five pamphlets on *Church Discipline* His unfortunate marriage in 1643 produced his pamphlets on *Divorce*, and he wrote a "*Tractate on Education*" in the following year His *Areopagitica*, a plea for the freedom of the press, came out in the same year In 1648 he wrote a vindication of the execution of Charles I, and in consequence was offered and accepted the post of Latin Secretary under the new Government in 1649 From that time for ten years, his life was spent in interminable controversies with the enemies of the Commonwealth, a thankless task which cost him his eyesight

The only poetry produced in all these twenty years was a handful of sonnets, ' alas ! too few "

III *Third period* 1660-1674

The fall of Milton the politician was the salvation of Milton the poet. The Restoration, by destroying Puritanism as a political power, restored the nobility of the Puritans to literature, and made the *Paradise Lost* possible.

In the general downfall of 1660, Milton suffered, but not very severely. He lost much of his property, and he was in hiding for a time to avoid arrest. But he had not been one of Puritan leaders, and he was soon allowed to settle down in London, if not in great comfort, at any rate, in peace and freedom.

In this enforced leisure his mind naturally turned to his great life purpose, and in blindness and poverty and defeat he wrote his great epic, "*Paradise Lost*." It was finished in 1663 and published in 1665. He began "*Paradise Regained*" in 1665, and published it and his last poem "*Samson Agonistes*" in 1670. In the last four years of his life he was engaged in writing some prose works of secondary interest.

His old-age was comparatively peaceful. He had married a third wife in 1666, who lovingly attended to his wants. (His first wife had died in 1652 and he had married again in 1656, but lost his second wife fifteen months later in 1658). He was visited by a group of friends such as Andrew Marvel, Thomas Ellwood and the rising Dryden. Still, there is too much truth in Shelley's lines —

“ He died,

Who was the Sire of an immortal strain,  
Blind, old and lonely, when his country's pride  
The priest, the slave, and the liberticide  
Trampled and mocked with many a loathed rite  
Of lust and blood, he went, unterrified,  
Into the gulf of death, but his clear Sprite  
Yet reigns o'er earth, the third among the sons of light ”

MILTON DIED ON NOV 8 1674

## II COMUS,

### I *External History*

Milton wrote *Comus* during his residence at Horton, to celebrate the entrance of the Earl of Bridgewater upon his duties as Lord Lieutenant of Wales. The earl had received the appointment in 1631, but he did not go to Wales until 1633, and did not formally take up his office until the autumn of 1634. To celebrate his inauguration, great festivities were prepared at Ludlow Castle, his official residence, which were to include the performance of a masque. The furnishing of this masque was entrusted to Henry Lawes, the music-master of the Bridgewater family, who was a celebrated musician and the chief composer of the time. And Lawes, who could himself supply the music, asked Milton to supply the words. How or when Lawes and Milton had become acquainted we do not know. Probably their musical tastes and abilities had drawn them together, and Lawes, who was thirteen years Milton's senior, may easily have known him as a boy in his father's house, to which most of the musicians of the time were attracted. Any way, as one of Milton's Sonnets shews, the two men



were close friends, and they remained so during the troubles of the Civil wars, though Milton was a Roundhead and Lawes a Cavalier

Milton, who had already done Lawes a similar service by supplying the poetry for a Masque ("Arcades") performed for the Countess of Derby, the step-mother of the Earl of Bridgewater, accepted the commission, and produced *Comus*

The Masque, set to Lawes' music, was performed in the hall of Ludlow Castle, Sept 29, 1634, the part of the Lady being acted by Alice, youngest daughter of the Earl of Bridgewater, those of the two brothers by his sons John, Viscount Brockley, and Thomas Egerton, and that of the Attendant Spirit by Henry Lawes himself. The poetry was evidently much admired, for Lawes was so importuned for copies that at last he published the poem in 1637. In this edition the poem is simply called, "A Maske presented at Ludlow Castle 1634 etc," and Milton's name does not appear at all. In Milton's editions of his poems in 1645 and 1673, it is similarly called, 'A Mask by the same author presented at Ludlow Castle 1634 etc.' It is not known when or by whom the title '*Comus*' was introduced, but it does not appear in any edition until 1745.

## II *The Masque*

*Comus* is a Masque. If Dr Johnson had remembered this, he would have saved himself from writing some very wrong-headed criticism. He criticised *Comus* as a play, and as a play has very different aims and a

very different nature to a Masque, he went seriously wrong

As the Masque is now obsolete, it is necessary to say something of its history and purpose, that we may judge this particular Masque fairly

The Masque had its origin in Italy, and was probably a combination of two forms of scenic and dramatic amusement—the pageant, and the masquerade. The Italian pageants were originally great processions organised for religious purposes by the Church, but later they became less and less religious and more and more classical. Allegorical shows, consisting of gorgeously dressed figures representing some religious incident or idea, or some classical mythological subject, were dragged through the streets in huge decorated chariots. There was no attempt at any acting, and probably at first no music—the shows were elaborate *tableaux vivants*, and the effect purely spectacular. The masquerades were private entertainments given in the gardens and houses of rich gentlemen. They have been called “allegorical ballets,” and consisted in elaborate dances the dancers being masked and dressed in fantastic allegorical costumes. For example, a comedy played at Urbino in 1513, was furnished with masque interludes, one after each act. The second of these was a “Masque of Venus drawn along in her car by a couple of doves, and surrounded by a bevy of Cupids tossing flame from lighted tapers. They set fire to a door, out of which there leaped eight gallant fellows, all in flames, careering round the stage in a

fantastic figure" The main characteristics of the masquerade were the classical nature of the subjects, the allegorical treatment, the music, and the dancing

The pageant and the masquerade were soon combined into an elaborate performance, containing the chief elements, of both, called the Masque, which required the services of painter, musician, playwright, sculptor, architect, singer and actor These performances became very costly and magnificent, and the best artists and architects, singers and actors did not disdain to devote their genius to them

This elaborate Italian Masque was first introduced into England in the time of Henry VIII It became common under Elizabeth but it rose to its greatest glory in the reigns of James I and Charles I James I was the special patron of the Masque, and had many produced at the Court, and expected to see them presented at the houses of his nobles when he visited them In his time, and under his son they became very elaborate and costly, and more and more literary and dramatic The best artists of the day devoted themselves to the production of Masques Alfonso Ferrabosco, a famous Italian musician, settled in England, wrote music for them, Inigo Jones, the great architect, designed scenery for them, Ben Jonson, the friend of Shakespeare, wrote poetry for them, and some of the best masques were from his pen

Almost every notable event among the nobility and in the royal family was celebrated by a Masque—weddings, comings of age, royal visits, conferring of titles, etc So the Earl of Bridgewater was simply conforming

to the fashion of the time when he celebrated his formal entry upon office in 1634, by the performance of a Masque at Ludlow Castle

*Comus* was almost the last great Masque written. Soon after came the Civil War, and the long dominance of the Puritans, to whom such worldly amusements were things of the devil. After the Restoration it was revived, but only feebly, and soon died. One reason for this was its enormous cost, which made it an amusement for the rich few only. For instance, it cost the lawyers of the Inns of Court £ 21,000 to produce Shirley's *Triumph of Peace* before King Charles and his Queen in 1633, and a Masque scarcely ever cost less than £ 1,400. Another reason was the revival of the drama under Charles II, which was much more real and human, and so appealed more to the people.

To sum up—the characteristics of the Masque, as distinct from the play, were—the predominance of music and spectacular display and scenic effects, the allegorical method of representing subjects of classical mythology, the small scope given to the dramatic art. From *Comus*, therefore, we must not expect what we do from a play of Shakespeare. We cannot expect subtle characterisation, dramatic power, elaborate action. The Masque has canons of its own, and must be judged by them. The effects it is designed to produce are poetic, decorative, and musical.

### III *The Argument of Comus*

The plot of *Comus* is quite simple, but it may be well to summarise the slight story as a guide to the reading.

of the poem itself *Comus* is divided into three scenes, which we may describe thus —

1 The Tempter and the Tempted lines 1 658

*Scene* A wild wood

2 The Temptation and the Rescue lines 659 958

*Scene* The palace of Comus

3 The Triumph lines 959 1023

*Scene* Ludlow Castle

1 The *first scene* — A WILD WOOD The Masque opens with the entrance of the Attendant Spirit, who explains that he has been sent by Jove to see to the safety of the children of the noble peer (Earl of Bridgewater), just appointed to his post in Wales These children are in danger They are coming to attend the ceremonies of the entrance of their father on his office, and their way lies through a wood where dwells a terrible enchanter, Comus, the son of Bacchus and Circe, who, by his enchantments, turns men and women who get into his power, into beasts

The Attendant Spirit then disguises himself as a servant of the family, and, as he hears the approach of Comus, disappears

Comus, followed by a strange crowd of monsters having human bodies but animals' heads, enters Comus addresses them, saying that as night has come, they can join in their revels, and they begin to dance After a time, however, he stops the dance, having perceived by his magic the approach of some chaste virgin He drives

his companions away into the wood, and prepares his enchantments, so that, when the stranger shall see him, she will think him some harmless villager

As the Lady enters, Comus steps aside, so that he may see and listen unseen. The Lady, as she comes in, is soliloquizing, explaining that she and her two brothers were journeying through the wood, and when she grew tired, they had made her rest under the trees, and had gone on to find some berries and fruit for her to eat. But they had never returned, and as night had now come on she feared they were lost in the wood. She is afraid, but appealing to conscience, faith, hope and chastity, she feels she is protected by God himself. Just then she sees a gleam of light in the dark clouded sky, and, encouraged, she sings a song to attract the attention of her brother.

The song, however, brings in, not the brothers, but Comus, who comes in the disguise of a simple shepherd. He has been so delighted with the appearance and singing of the Lady that he is determined by his spells to make her his own. He enters into conversation with her, and she explains her difficulties. He tells her he has seen her brothers, and promises to guide her to where they were, in the meantime he offers her the humble hospitality of his shepherd's hut, which the Lady gladly accepts.

When Comus and the Lady have gone out, the two brothers enter, searching through the dark wood for their sister. They are engaged in conversation, the younger brother expressing anxious fears as to their sister's safety, which fears the elder brother tries to allay with philosophy.

discourse He strikes the keynote of the poem with a noble argument on the protective power of chastity—"She that hath that is clad in complete steel"

The conversation is interrupted by a distant shout, and presently the Attendant Spirit, habited like a shepherd, enters He is at once recognised and welcomed by the brothers as a servant of their father's, Thyrsis He inquires anxiously after the Lady, and when he is informéd she is lost in the wood, he is very disturbed, and explains to the horrified brothers the existence and power of Comus, the Enchanter Then he tells them he had heard their sister's voice, singing, had followed the sound, and arrived just in time to see the Lady being led away by the disguised Comus He had at once hurried away in search of the brothers The brothers in their rage want to rush off at once to attack the Enchanter, but their companion checks them, shewing the hopelessness of contending against his spells unless armed with stronger spells He gives them a magic plant called 'Hæmony,' which will protect them against all enchantment, and instructs them to attack Comus and his crew boldly, break his cup containing his magic draught, and seize his magic wand, without which he will be powerless

## 2 *The Second scene* THE PALACE OF COMUS

The second scene is the interior of a stately palace, where Comus and his followers are assembled, feasting, and the Lady is set in an enchanted chair Comus offers her his glass, containing a magic potion that will change her nature if she drinks it, but she refuses it and tries to

rise She has been entrapped by the Enchanter, and is apparently in his power Then follows a conversation between Comus and the Lady in which the main teachings of the Masque are brought forth Comus brings forth all the specious and plausible arguments of philosophy to shew the innocence, necessity and right of the indulgence of all the appetites and passions The Lady answers with the righteous indignation of a pure woman, tears his specious arguments to pieces, and affirms the divine beauty of chastity Comus, beaten in argument, is alarmed, and urgently presses the magic cup to the Lady's lips

At this critical moment, the two brothers rush in with drawn swords, wrest the cup out of the hand of Comus, and dash it to pieces on the ground, and drive all his following out The Attendant Spirit then enters and upbids them for not completing their work by seizing the Enchanter's wand Without this it is impossible to free the Lady, who still sits in the enchanted chair However, he remembers that near where they are is a beautiful nymph, called Sabrina, the Lady of the river Severn, who is the special protector of virgins "She can unlock the clasp of charm, and thaw the numbing spell" The Attendant Spirit then sings "some adjuring verse," a Song summoning Sabrina to come to their help As the Song ends, Sabrina rises, attended by water-nymphs, singing in answer The Attendant Spirit explains what they want her to do, and Sabrina breaks the spell by sprinkling water on the breast, fingers and lips of the Lady, and touching the Magic chair "with chaste palms,



moist and cold" She then disappears, and the Lady rises from her seat. The Attendant Spirit sings again in praise of Sabrina, and bids the Lady fly with him from the cursed palace to her father's castle

### 3 *Third scene*—LUDLOW TOWN, AND THE PRESIDENT'S CASTLE

Festivities are being held to celebrate the inauguration of the Lady's father, and a company of country dancers come in. The Attendant Spirit presents the Lady and her two brothers to their father and mother, God having tried their youth, faith, patience and truth, and sent them

"To triumph in victorious dance  
O'er sensual folly and intemperance"

After the dances are ended, the Attendant Spirit delivers an epilogue in which he explains that, his task being successfully accomplished, he can return to his happy home above the sky. He closes with the moral of the whole poem —

"Mortals that would follow me,  
Love Virtue she alone is free  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery chime,  
Or if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her"

### 4 *Sources of Comus*

It is admitted that Milton was indebted for some of his ideas in writing *Comus*, to previous writers, just as Shakespeare freely borrowed the plots of many of his

plays. Omitting the mention of some not clearly proved or unimportant, the following certainly had something to do with the creation of the Masque

1 *The Old Wives' Tale* (1595) of George Peele, an Elizabethan poet (1558-1598). The story is very similar to that of *Comus*. It contains two brothers in search of a sister, whom an enchanter has imprisoned and to whom he has given a magic potion, an Old Man, skilled in magic, who teaches the brothers how to rescue their sister, and a rescue similar to that described in *Comus*. Milton had probably read this old play, and got from it the subject of his Masque.

2 *Comus, the Magician*, is a creation of Milton's own (see Notes). But he probably derived some hints for the Character from a Latin play called *Comus*, by a Dutchman, Hendrik van der Putten (*Erycius Puteanus*). This book was first printed in 1608, but it was reissued in 1634, the year when Milton composed his Masque. The character of Puteanus' "Comus" is something like that of Milton's and it is very likely Milton took some hints from the Dutchman's play.

3 The Circe myth comes originally, of course, from Homer's "Odyssey." But Milton's presentation of it in *Comus* seems to have been influenced by Spenser's description of the enchantress Acrasia in his *Faery Queene*. Two other books that deal with the same theme, and which Milton had probably read, also possibly influenced him in this connection—viz. *The Inner Temple Masque*

(1614), by Browne, and *Christ's Victorie on Earth*, by Giles Fletcher •

4 Fletcher's pastoral, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, composed before 1625, and acted in London theatres 1633 and 1634, gave Milton many hints for the legend of the river goddess Sabrina, who rescues the Lady in *Comus*. The story of the presiding nymph of the river Severn was chosen by Milton in compliment to the Bridgewater family, Ludlow Castle being in that neighbourhood but the conception of nymph Sabrina, the incidents, and the lyric movement of this part of *Comus*, all strongly reflect the influence of Fletcher.

The fact that Milton borrowed part of his plot, and some of his ideas, from others, does not, however, in any way detract from the originality of his poem. He takes freely, as Shakespeare did, but he changes his borrowings by his genius into things of new and original beauty. He adds much that is new and his own, he breathes a new life and meaning into the things that are old and he fuses all the elements into a whole—a new and beautiful and inspired poem. "In spite, however, of his obligations to the inventions of others, the architectural genius of Milton in *Comus* is so conspicuously exerted that no poem creates an effect of greater originality\*."

#### 5 *The Teaching of Comus*

The sketch of the story of the Masque will already have shown that Milton did not write it merely to amuse. Through all its cleverly developed incidents its charming romance, its delightful poetry, there runs a serious purpose

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\* W. J. Courthope "A history of English Poetry"

We do not know what effect it produced on the audience that witnessed its production at Ludlow<sup>e</sup> Castle in 1634, but as we read the Masque we cannot help feeling that the effect must have been something deeper than mere pleasure and amusement. The noble, impassioned teaching of the grandeur and power of chastity through a medium generally used to teach the exact opposite, must have had an astonishing, if not somewhat sobering, effect on a company which had assembled merely to be amused. For *Comus* is really a poem in praise of virtue, goodness and temperate living. As Prof Dowden says, "From the first scene to the last the drama is a representation of the trials, difficulties, and dangers to which moral purity is exposed in this world, and of the victory of the better principle in the soul caused by strenuous human endeavour aided by the grace of God." There was no doctrine nearer to Milton's heart than this—that the one thing that mattered in life, the one thing that must ultimately triumph, was sobriety of life, temperance, purity. He himself had earned at Cambridge the mocking nickname "Lady of Christ's" for this very quality and moral purity breathes through all his works from first to last.

*Comus* is very interesting as marking the passing from one Milton, so to speak, to the other. For there were two Miltons. On the one hand, his classical education, his musical nature, his poetical genius inclined him to the Renaissance, on the other hand, his home training, his stern and almost ascetic moral nature, his Puritan beliefs, made him a child of the Reformation. He was

Cavalier and Roundhead both, and both struggled within him. It is the Milton of the Renaissance that writes *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, though the moral purity of both these poems reveals his Puritan nature. It is the Milton of the Reformation who writes *Paradise Lost*. But it is the double Milton who writes *Comus*. That he should write a Masque at all, and one of such classical beauty, shews him to be still the Cavalier, that he should use the Masque as a medium of preaching to a frivolous and dissolute age the greatness of moral purity, shows he was definitely becoming the Puritan. "*Comus* has the gorgeous scenic effects, the music and dancing of the Masques, but its moral purpose and its ideal teachings are unmistakable. 'The Triumph of Virtue' would be a better name for this perfect little masque, for its theme is that virtue and innocence can walk through any peril of this world without permanent harm" (Dr W J Long). One might say *Comus* is a Puritan sermon in the guise of a Cavalier Masque. *Comus* is the indication that the Puritan was to win the day. In his next poem, *Lucifer*, the Puritanism comes out strong and clear in the famous passage about "the pilot of the Gulcan lake." And a few years after, Milton is ranged definitely with the Parliament, a militant foe of the Cavalier and all his works.

The significance of the moral teaching of *Comus*, therefore, must have struck the men of the time much more strongly than it can us, who simply read the poem in another age. Milton wrote it on the eve of a great

struggle, at a time when men were drawing apart into two camps and it must have sounded to them as a trumpet protest on the side of godliness against the lightness, folly, dissolute living and specious philosophy that excused vice, which characterised the Royalist party

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COMUS,

A MASK

PRESENTED AT LUDLOW CASTLE, 1634

BEFORE

JOHN, EARL OF BRIDGEWATER,

THEN PRESIDENT OF WALES

*The Copy of a Letter written by Sir Henry Wotton to the  
Author upon the following Poem*

From the College this 13 of April, 1638

SIR,

It was a special favour, when you lately bestowed upon me here the first taste of your acquaintance, though no longer than to make me know that I wanted more time to value it, and to enjoy it rightly, and, in truth, if I could then have imagined your farther stay in these parts, which I understood afterwards by Mr. H., I would have been bold, in our vulgar phrase, to mend my draught (for you left me with an extreme thirst), and to have begged your conversation again, jointly with your said learned friend, at a poor meal or two, that we might have banded together some good authors of the ancient time, among which I observed you to have been familiar

Since your going, you have charged me with new obligations, both for a very kind letter from you dated the sixth of this month, and for a dainty piece of entertainment which came therewith. Wherein I should much commend the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Doric delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language *Ipsa mollitres*. But I must not omit to tell you, that I now only owe you thanks for intimating unto me (how

\* It is delicacy itself



modestly &cœver) the true artificer For the work itself I had viewed some good while before, with singular delight, having received it from our common friend Mr R in the very close of the late R's poems, printed at Oxford, whereunto it is added (as I now suppose) that the reception might help out the principal, according to the art of stationers, and to leave the reader *con la bocca dolce*\*

Now, Sir concerning your travels, wherein I may challenge a little more privilege of discourse with you, I suppose you will not blanch† Paris in your way, therefore I have been bold to trouble you with a few lines to Mr M B, whom you shall easily find attending the young Lord S as his governor, and you may surely receive from him good directions for shaping of your further journey into Italy, where he did reside by my choice some time for the king, after mine own recess from Venice

I should think that your best line will be through the whole length of sistance to Marseille, and thence by sea to Genoa, whence the passage into Tuscany is as diurnal as a Gravesend barge I hasten, as you do, to Florence, or Siena, the rather to tell you a short story, from the interest, you have given me in your safety

At Siena I was tabled in the house of one Alberto Scipione, an old Roman courtier in dangerous times, having been steward to the Duca di Pagliano, who with all his family were strangled, save this only man, that escaped by

\* With a sweet taste in his mouth (so that he may desire more)

† Avoid.

foresight of the tempest With him I had often much chat of those affairs, into which he took pleasure to look back from his native harbour, and at my departure toward Rome (which had been the centre of his experience) I had won confidence enough to beg his advice, how I might carry my elf securely there, without offence of others, or of mine own conscience *Signor Arrigo mio* (says he), *I pensieri stretti, ed il viso sciolto*\*, will go safely over the whole world Of which Delphian oracle (for so I have found it) your judgment doth need no commentary, and therefore, Sir, I will commit you with it to the best of all securities, God's dear love, remaining  
Your friend as much to command

as any of longer date,

HENRY WOTTON

*Postscript*

Sir,—I have expressly sent this my footboy to prevent your departure without some acknowledgment from me of the receipt of your obliging letter, having myself through some business, I know not how, neglected the ordinary conveyance In any part where I shall understand you fixed, I shall be glad and diligent to entertain you with home-novelties, even for some fomentation of our friendship, too soon interrupted in the cradle†

\* "Thoughts close, countenance open"

† This letter was printed in the edition of 1645, but omitted in that of 1673 It was written by Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eton College, just in time to overtake Milton before he set out on his journey to Italy As a parting act of courtesy Milton had sent Sir Henry a letter with a copy of Lawes's edition of his *Comus*, and the above letter is an acknowledgment of the favour

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE\*  
JOHN, LORD VISCOUNT BRACKLEY,

*Son and Heir-Apparent to the Earl of Bridgewater, etc*

MY LORD,

THIS Poem, which received its first occasion of birth from yourself and others of your noble family, and much honour from your own person in the performance, now returns again to make a final Dedication of itself to you. Although not openly acknowledged by the Author, yet it is a legitimate offspring, so lovely and so much desired that the often copying of it hath tired my pen to give my several friends satisfaction, and brought me to a necessity of producing it to the public view, and now to offer it up, in all rightful devotion, to those fair hopes and rare endowments of your much-promising youth, which give a full assurance to all that know you, of a future excellence. Live, sweet Lord, to be the honour of your name, and receive this as your own, from the hands of him who hath by many favours been long obliged to your most honoured Parents, and as in this representation your attendant *Thyrsis*, so now in all real expression

Your faithful and most humble Servant,

H LAWES

\* Dedication of the anonymous edition of 1637 reprinted in the edition of 1655, but omitted in that of 1673

## THE PERSONS

THE ATTENDANT SPIRIT, afterwards in the habit of THYRSIS  
COMUS, with his Crew

THE LADY

FIRST BROTHER

SECOND BROTHER

SABRINA, the Nymph

The Chief Persons which presented were —

The Lord Brackley ,

Mr Thomas Egerton, his Brother ,

The Lady Alice Egerton

# COMUS

*The first Scene discovers a wild wood*

*The ATTENDANT SPIRIT descends or enters*

BEFORE the stairy threshold of Jove's court  
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes  
Of bright ærial spirits live insphered  
In regions mild of calm and serene air,  
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot 5  
Which men call Earth, and, with low thoughted care,  
Confined and pestered in this pinfold here,  
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,  
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,  
After this mortal change, to her true servants, 10  
Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats  
Yet some there be that by due steps aspire  
To lay their just hands on that golden key  
That opes the palace of eternity  
To such my errand is, and, but for such, 15  
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds  
With the rank vapours of this sin worn mould

But to my task Neptune, besides the sway  
Of every salt flood and each ebbing stream,  
Took in by lot, 'twixt high and nether Jove, 20  
Imperial rule of all the sea girt isles  
That, like to rich and various gems, inlay

The unadorned bosom of the deep ,  
 Which he, to grace his tributary gods,  
 By course commits to several government, 25  
 And gives them leave to wear their sapphire crowns  
 And wield their little tridents But this Isle,  
 The greatest and the best of all the main,  
 He quarters to his blue haired deities ,  
 And all this tract that fronts the falling sun 30  
 A noble Peer of mickle trust and power  
 Has in his charge, with tempered awe to guide  
 An old and haughty nation, proud in arms  
 Where his fair offspring, nursed in princely lore,  
 Are coming to attend their father's state, 35  
 And new intrusted sceptre But their way  
 Lies through the perplexed paths of this drear wood,  
 The nodding horror of whose shady brows  
 Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger ,  
 And here their tender age might suffer peril, 40  
 But that, by quick command from sovran Jove,  
 I was despatched for their defence and guard  
 And listen why , for I will tell you now  
 What never yet was heard in tale or song,  
 From old or modern bard, in hall or bower 45

Bacchus, that first from out the purple grape  
 Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine,  
 After the Tuscan mariners transformed,  
 Coasting the Tyrrhene shore, as the winds listed,  
 On Circe's island fell (who knows not Circe, 50  
 The daughter of the Sun, whose charmed cup  
 Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,  
 And downward fell into a grovelling swine ?)

This Nymph, that gazed upon his clustering locks,  
With ivy berries wreathed, and his blithe youth, 55  
Had by him, ere he parted thence, a son  
Much like his father, but his mother more,  
Whom therefore she brought up, and Comus named  
Who, ripe and frolic of his full-grown age,  
Roving the Celtic and Iberian fields, 60  
At last betakes him to this ominous wood,  
And, in thick shelter of black shades imbowered,  
Excels his mother at her mighty art ,  
Offering to every weary traveller  
His orient liquor in a crystal glass, 65  
To quench the drouth of Phœbus , which as they taste  
(For most do taste, through fond intemperate thirst),  
Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,  
The express resemblance of the gods, is changed  
Into some brutish form of wolf or bear, 70  
Or ounce or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,  
All other parts remaining as they were  
And they, so perfect is their misery,  
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,  
But boast themselves more comely than before, 75  
And all their friends and native home forget,  
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty  
Therefore, when any favoured of high Jove  
Chances to pass through this adventurous glade,  
Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star 80  
I shoot from heaven, to give him safe convoy,  
As now I do But first I must put off  
These my sky robes, spun out of Iris' woof,  
And take the weeds and likeness of a swain

That to the service of this house belongs, 85  
 Who, with his soft pipe and smooth dittied song,  
 Well knows to still the wild winds when they roar,  
 And hush the waving woods, nor of less faith,  
 And in this office of his mountain watch  
 Likeliest, and nearest to the present aid 90  
 Of this occasion But I hear the tread  
 Of hateful steps, I must be viewless now

*COMUS enters, with a charming rod in one hand, his glass in the other, with him a rout of monsters, headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts, but otherwise like men and women, their apparel glistening They come in making a riotous and unruly noise, with torches in their hands*

*Comus* The star that bids the shepherd fold  
 Now the top of heaven doth hold,  
 And the gilded car of day 95  
 His glowing axle doth allay  
 In the steep Atlantic stream,  
 And the slope sun his upward beam  
 Shoots against the dusky pole,  
 Pacing toward the other goal  
 Of his chamber in the east 100  
 Meanwhile, welcome joy and feast,  
 Midnight shout and revelry,  
 Tipsy dance and jollity  
 Braid your locks with rosy twine, 105  
 Dropping odours, dropping wine  
 Rigour now is gone to bed,  
 And Advice with scrupulous head,  
 Strict Age, and sour Severity,  
 With their grave saws, in slumber lie 110



We, that are of purer fire,  
Imitate the starry quire,  
Who, in their nightly watchful spheres,  
Lead in swift round the months and years  
The sounds, and seas, with all their finny drove, 115  
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move ,  
And on the tawny sands and shelves  
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves  
By dimpled brook and fountain brim,  
The wood nymphs, decked with daisies trim, 120  
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep  
What hath might to do with sleep ?  
Night hath better sweets to prove ,  
Venus now wakes, and wakens Love.  
Come, let us our rights begin , 125  
'Tis only daylight that makes sin,  
Which these dun shades will ne'er report  
Hail, goddess of nocturnal sport,  
Dark veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame  
Of midnight torches burns ' mysterious dame, 130  
That ne'er art called but when the dragon womb  
Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom,  
And makes one blot of all the air  
Stay thy cloudy ebon chair,  
Wherein thou ridest with Hecat', and befriend 135  
Us thy vowed priests, till utmost end  
Of all thy dues be done, and none left out ,  
Ere the blabbing eastern scout,  
The nice Morn, on the Indian steep,  
From her cabined loop-hole peep, 140  
And to the tell tale Sun descry

Our concealed solemnity  
 Come, knit hands, and beat the ground  
 In a light fantastic round [The Measure

Break off, break off,—I feel the different pace 145  
 Of some chaste footing near about this ground  
 Run to your shrouds within these brakes and trees,  
 Our number may affright Some virgin sure  
 (For so I can distinguish by mine art)  
 Benighted in these woods ! Now to my charms, 150  
 And to my wily trains I shall ere long  
 Be well stocked with as fair a herd as grazed  
 About my mother Circe Thus I hurl  
 My dazzling spells into the spongy air,  
 Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion, 155  
 And give it false presentments, lest the place  
 And my quaint habits breed astonishment,  
 And put the damsel to suspicious flight,  
 Which must not be, for that's against my course  
 I, under fair pretence of friendly ends, 160  
 And well placed words of glozing courtesy,  
 Baited with reasons not unpalatable,  
 Wind me into the easy hearted man,  
 And hug him into snares When once her eye  
 Hath met the virtue of this magic dust, 165  
 I shall appear some harmless villager,  
 Whom thrift keeps up about his country gear.  
 But here she comes, I fairly step aside,  
 And hearken, if I may, her business here

*The LADY enters*

*Lady* This way the noise was, if mine ear be true—170  
 My best guide now Methought it was the sound

Of riot and ill managed merriment,  
Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe  
Stirs up among the loose unlettered hinds,  
When, for their teeming flocks and granges full 175  
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,  
And thank the gods amiss I should be loth  
To meet the rudeness and swilled insolence  
Of such late wassailers, yet, oh ! where else  
Shall I inform my unacquainted feet 180  
In the blind mazes of this tangled wood ?  
My brothers, when they saw me wearied out  
With this long way, resolving here to lodge  
Under the spreading favour of these pines,  
Stepped, as they said, to the next thicket-side 185  
To bring me berries, or such cooling fruit  
As the kind hospitable woods provide  
They left me then when the grey-hooded Even,  
Like a sad votarist in palmer's weed,  
Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus' wain 190  
But where they are, and why they came not back,  
Is now the labour of my thoughts 'Tis likehest  
They had engaged their wandering steps too far,  
And envious darkness, ere they could return,  
Had stole them from me Else, O thievish Night, 195  
Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,  
In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars  
That Nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps  
With everlasting oil, to give due light  
To the misled and lonely traveller ? 200  
This is the place, as well as I may guess,  
Whence even now the tumult of loud murth



By slow Meander's margent green,  
 And in the violet embroidered vale  
 Where the love-lorn nightingale  
 Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well 235  
 Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair  
 That likest thy Narcissus are ?

O, if thou have  
 Hid them in some flowery cave,  
 Tell me but where, 240  
 Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Sphere !  
 So may'st thou be translated to the skies,  
 And give resounding grace to all Heaven's harmonies !

*Comus*    *Aside* Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould  
 Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment ? 245  
 Sure something holy lodges in that breast,  
 And with these raptures moves the vocal air  
 To testify his hidden residence.  
 How sweetly did they float upon the wings  
 Of silence, through the empty vaulted night, 250  
 At every fall smoothing the raven down  
 Of darkness till it smiled ! I have oft heard  
 My mother Circe with the Sirens three,  
 Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,  
 Culling their potent herbs and baleful drugs, 255  
 Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul,  
 And lap it in Elysium    Scylla wept,  
 And chid her barking waves into attention,  
 And fell Charybdis murmured soft applause  
 Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense, 260  
 And in sweet madness robbed it of itself,  
 But such a sacred and home-felt delight,

Such sober certainty of waking bliss,  
 I never heard till now I'll speak to her,  
 And she shall be my queen —Hail, foreign wonder ! 265  
 Whom certain these rough shades did never breed,  
 Unless the goddess that in rural shrine  
 Dwell'st here with Pan or Sylvan, by blest song  
 Forbidding every bleak unkindly fog  
 To touch the prosperous growth of this tall wood 270

*Lady* Nay, gentle shepherd, ill is lost that praise  
 That is addressed to unattending ears  
 Not any boast of skill, but extreme shift  
 How to regain my severed company,  
 Compelled me to awake the courteous Echo 275  
 To give me answer from her mossy couch

*Comus* What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus ?

*Lady* Dim darkness and this leafy labyrinth

*Comus* Could that divide you from near ushering  
 guides ?

*Lady* They left me weary on a grassy turf 280

*Comus* By falsehood, or discourtesy, or why ?

*Lady* To seek i' the valley some cool friendly spring

*Comus* And left your fair side all unguarded, lady ?

*Lady* They were but twain, and purposed quick return

*Comus* Perhaps forestalling night prevented them 285

*Lady* How easy my misfortune is to hit !

*Comus* Imports their loss, beside the present need ?

*Lady* No less than if I should my brothers lose

*Comus* Were they of manly prime, or youthful bloom ?

*Lady* As smooth as Hebe's their unrazored lips 290

*Comus* Two such I saw, what time the laboured ox

In his loose traces from the furrow came,  
 And the swinkt hedger at his supper sat  
 I saw them under a green mantling vine,  
 That crawls along the side of yon small hill, 295  
 Plucking ripe clusters from the tender shoots ,  
 Their port was more than human, as they stood  
 I took it for a faery vision  
 Of some gay creatures of the element,  
 That in the colours of the rainbow live, 300  
 And play i' the plighted clouds I was awe strook,  
 And, as I passed, I worshiped If those you seek,  
 It were a journey like the path to Heaven  
 To help you find them

*Lady* Gentle villager,  
 What readiest way would bring me to that place ? 305  
*Comus* Due west it rises from this shrubby point  
*Lady* To find out that, good shepherd, I suppose,  
 In such a scant allowance of star light,  
 Would overtask the best land pilot's art,  
 Without the sure guess of well practised feet 310  
*Comus* I know each lane, and every alley green,  
 Dingle, or bushy dell, of this wild wood,  
 And every bosky bourn from side to side,—  
 My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood ,  
 And, if your stray attendance be yet lodged, 315  
 Or shroud within these limits, I shall know  
 Ere morrow wake, or the low roosted lark  
 From her thatched pallet rouse If otherwise,  
 I can conduct you, lady, to a low  
 But loyal cottage, where you may be safe 320  
 Till further quest

*Lady* Shepherd, I take thy word,  
 And trust thy honest offered courtesy,  
 Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,  
 With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls  
 And courts of princes, where it first was named, 325  
 And yet is most pretended In a place  
 Less warranted than this, or less secure,  
 I cannot be, that I should fear to change it  
 Eye me, blest Providence, and square my trial  
 To my proportioned strength! Shepherd, lead on 330  
[*Exeunt*

*Enter the Two BROTHERS*

*Elder Brother* Unmuffle, ye faint stars, and thou, fair  
 moon,  
 That won'tst to love the traveller's benison,  
 Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,  
 And disinherit Chaos, that reigns here  
 In double night of darkness and of shades, 335  
 Or, if your influence be quite dammed up  
 With black usurping mists, some gentle taper,  
 Though a rush candle from the wicker hole  
 Of some clay habitation, visit us  
 With thy long levelled rule of streaming light, 340  
 And thou shalt be our star of Arcady,  
 Or Tyrian Cynosure

*Second Brother* Or, if our eyes  
 Be barred that happiness, might we but hear  
 The folded flocks, penned in their wattled cotes,  
 Or sound of pastoral reed with oaten stops, 345  
 Or whistle from the lodge, or village cock  
 Count the night-watches to his feathery dames,



'Twould be some solace yet, some little cheering,  
In this close dungeon of innumerable boughs  
But, Oh, that hapless virgin, our lost sister ! 350  
Where may she wander now, whither betake her  
From the chill dew, amongst rude burs and thistles ?  
Perhaps some cold bank is her bolster now,  
Or 'gainst the rugged bark of some broad elm  
Leans her unpillow'd head, fraught with sad fears 355  
What if in wild amazement and affright ?  
Or, while we speak, within the direful grasp  
Of savage hunger, or of savage heat, !  
*Elder Brother*, Peace, brother be not over exquisite  
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils , 360  
For, grant they be so, while they rest unknown,  
What need a man forestall his date of grief,  
And run to meet what he would most avoid ?  
Or, if they be but false alarms of fear,  
How bitter is such self delusion ! 365  
I do not think my sister so to seek,  
Or so unprincipled in virtue's book,  
And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever,  
As that the single want of light and noise  
(Not being in danger, as I trust she is not) 370  
Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,  
And put them into misbecoming plight  
Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon  
Were in the flat sea sunk And Wisdom's self 375  
Oft seeks to sweet retired solityde,  
Where, with her best nurse, Contemplation,  
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings,  
That, in the various bustle of resort,

Were all to ruffled, and sometimes impaired 380  
 He that has light within his own clear breast  
 May sit i' the centre, and enjoy bright day  
 But he that hides a dark soul and foul thoughts  
 Benighted walks under the mid day sun ,  
 Himself is his own dungeon 385

*Second Brother* 'Tis most true,  
 That musing meditation most affects  
 The pensive secrecy of desert cell,  
 Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,  
 And sits as safe as in a senate house ,  
 For who would rob a hermit of his weeds, 390  
 His few books, or his beads, or maple dish,  
 Or do his grey hairs any violence ?  
 But Beauty, like the fair Hesperian tree  
 Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard  
 Of dragon watch with unenchanted eye 395  
 To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit,  
 From the rash hand of bold Incontinence  
 You may as well spread out the unsunned heaps  
 Of miser's treasure by an outlaw's den,  
 And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope 400  
 Danger will wink on Opportunity,  
 And let a single helpless maiden pass  
 Uninjured in this wild surrounding waste  
 Of night or loneliness, it recks me not ,  
 I fear the dread events that dog them both, 405  
 Lest some ill greeting touch attempt the person  
 Of our unowned sister

*Elder Brother* I do not, brother,  
 Infer, as if I thought my sister's state

Secure, without all doubt or controversy ,  
 Yet, where an equal poise of hope and fear 410  
 Does arbitrate the event, my nature is  
 That I incline to hope rather than fear,  
 And gladly banish squint suspicion  
 My sister is not so defenceless left  
 As you imagine , she has a hidden strength, 415  
 Which you remember not

*Second Brother*                      What hidden strength,—  
 Unless the strength of Heaven, if you mean that ?

*Elder Brother*    I mean that too, but yet a hidden  
 strength,

Which, if Heaven gave it, may be termed her own  
 'Tis chastity, my brother, chastity 420  
 She that has that is clad in complete steel,  
 And, like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,  
 May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,  
 Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds ,  
 Where, through the sacred rays of chastity, 425  
 No savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer,  
 Will dare to soil her virgin purity  
 Yea, there where very desolation dwells,  
 By grots and caverns shagged with horrid shades,  
 She may pass on with unblenched majesty, 430  
 Be it not done in pride, or in presumption  
 Some say no evil thing that walks by night,  
 In fog or fire, by lake or moorish fen,  
 Blue meagre hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,  
 That breaks his magic chains at curfew time, 435  
 No goblin or swart faery of the mine,  
 Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity

Do ye believe me yet, or shall I call  
 Antiquity from the old schools of Greece  
 To testify the arms of chastity ? 440  
 Hence had the huntress Dian her dread bow  
 Fair silver shafted queen, for ever chaste,  
 Wherewith she tamed the brinded lioness  
 And spotted mountain pard, but set at nought  
 The frivolous bolt of Cupid , gods and men 445  
 Feared her stern frown, and she was queen o' the woods  
 What was that snaky headed Gorgon shield  
 That wise Minerva wore, unconquered virgin,  
 Wherewith she freezed her foes to congealed stone,  
 But rigid looks of chaste austerity, 450  
 And noble grace that dashed brute violence  
 With sudden adoration and blank awe ?  
 So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity  
 That, when a soul is found sincerely so,  
 A thousand liveried angels lackey her, 455  
 Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,  
 And in clear dream and solemn vision  
 Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear ,  
 Till oft converse with heavenly habitants  
 Begin to cast a beam on the outward shape, 460  
 The unpolluted temple of the mind,  
 And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,  
 Till all be made immortal ` But, when lust,  
 By uncharste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,  
 But most by lewd and lavish act of sin, 465  
 Lets in defilement to the inward parts,  
 The soul grows clotted by contagion,  
 Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite loose

The divine property of her first being  
 Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp, 470  
 Oft seen in charnel vaults and sepulchres,  
 Lingerin and sitting by a new made grave,  
 As loth to leave the body that it loved,  
 And linked itself by carnal sensuality  
 To a degenerate and degraded state 475

*Second Brother* How charming is divine Philosophy !  
 Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,  
 But musical as is Apollo's lute,  
 And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,  
 Where no crude surfeit reigns

*Elder Brother* List ! list ! I hear 480  
 Some far off halloo break the silent air

*Second Brother* Methought so too , what should it be ?

*Elder Brother* For certain ,  
 Either some one, like us, night-foundered here,  
 Or else some neighbour woodman or, at worst,  
 Some roving robber calling to his fellows 485

*Second Brother* Heaven keep my sister ! Again,  
 again, and near !

Best draw, and stand upon our guard

*Elder Brother* I'll halloo

If he be friendly, he comes well , if not,  
 Defence is a good cause, and Heaven be for us !

*Enter the ATTENDANT SPIRIT, habited like a shepherd*  
 That halloo I should know What are you ? speak. 490  
 Come not too near , you fall on iron stakes else

*Spirit* What voice is that ? my young Lord ? speak  
 again

*Second Brother* O brother, 'tis my father's shepherd,  
sure

*Elder Brother* Thyrsis ! whose artful strains have oft  
delayed 495

The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,  
And sweetened every musk rose of the dale  
How camest thou here, good swain ? Hath any ram  
Slipped from the fold, or young kid lost his dam,  
Or straggling wether the pent flock forsook ?  
How couldst thou find this dark sequestered nook ? 500

*Spirit* O my loved master's heir, and his next joy,  
I came not here on such a trivial toy  
As a strayed ewe, or to pursue the stealth  
Of pilfering wolf, not all the fleecy wealth  
I hat doth enrich these downs is worth a thought 505  
To this my errand, and the care it brought  
But, oh ! my virgin Lady, where is she ?  
How chance she is not in your company ?

*Elder Brother* To tell thee sadly, Shepherd, without  
blame

Or our neglect, we lost her as we came 510

*Spirit* Ay me unhappy ! then my fears are true

*Elder Brother* What fears, good Thyrsis ? Prithee  
briefly shew

*Spirit* I'll tell ye 'Tis not vain or fabulous  
(Though so esteemed by shallow ignorance)  
What the sage poets, taught by the heavenly Muse, 515  
Storied of old in high immortal verse  
Of dire Chimeras and enchanted isles,  
And rifted rocks whose entrance leads to Hell,

For such there be, but unbelief is blind.

Within the navel of this hideous wood, 520  
 Immured in cypress shades, a sorcerer dwells,  
 Of Bacchus and of Circe born, great Comus,  
 Deep skilled in all his mother's witcheries,  
 And here to every thirsty wanderer  
 By sly enticement gives his baneful cup, 525  
 With many murmurs mixed, whose pleasing poison  
 The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,  
 And the inglorious likeness of a beast  
 Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage  
 Charactered in the face This have I learnt 530  
 Tending my flocks hard by i' the hilly crofts  
 That brow this bottom glade, whence night by night  
 He and his monstrous rout are heard to howl  
 Like stabled wolves, or tigers at their prey,  
 Doing abhorred rites to Hecate 535  
 In their obscured haunts of inmost bowers  
 Yet have they many baits and guileful spells  
 To inveigle and invite the unwary sense  
 Of them that pass unweeting by the way  
 This evening late, by then the chewing flocks 540  
 Had ta'en their supper on the savoury herb  
 Of knot grass dew besprent, and were in fold,  
 I sat me down to watch upon a bank  
 With ivy canopied, and interwove  
 With flaunting heneysuckle, and began, 545  
 Wrapt in a pleasing fit of melancholy,  
 To meditate my rural minstrelsy,  
 Till fancy had her fill But ere a close,  
 The wonted roar was up amidst the woods,

And filled the air with barbarous dissonance , 550  
At which I ceased, and listened them awhile,  
Till an unusual stop of sudden silence  
Gave respite to the drowsy frightened steeds  
I hat draw the litter of close curtained Sleep,  
At last a soft and solemn breathing sound 555  
Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,  
And stole upon the air, that even Silence  
Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might  
Deny her nature, and be never more,  
Still to be so displaced I was all ear, 560  
And took in strains that might create a soul  
Under the ribs of Death, But, oh ! ere long  
I oo well I did peiceive it was the voice  
Of my most honoured Lady, your dear sister  
Amazed I stood, harrowed with grief and fear , 565  
And " O poor hapless nightingale," thought I,  
" How sweet thou sing'st, how near the deadly snare !"  
Then down the lawns I ran with headlong haste,  
I through paths and turnings often trod by day,  
Till, guided by mine ear, I found the place 570  
Where that damned wizard, hid in sly disguise  
(For so by certain signs I knew), had met  
Alrcady, ere my best speed could prevent,  
The aidless innocent lady, his wished prey  
Who gently asked if he had seen such two, 575  
Supposing him some neighbour villager,  
Longer I durst not stay, but soon I guessed  
Ye were the two she meant , with that I sprung  
Into swift flight, till I had found you here ,  
But further know I not



*Second Brother*                      O night and shades,                      580  
 How are ye joined with hell in triple knot  
 Against the unarmed weakness of one virgin,  
 Alone and helpless ' Is this the confidence  
 You gave me, brother ?

*Elder Brother*                      Yes, and keep it still ,  
 Lean on it safely , not a period                      585  
 Shall be unsaid for me    Against the threats  
 Of malice or of sorcery, or that power  
 Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm  
 Virtue may be assailed, but never hurt,  
 Surprised by unjust force, but not enthralled ,                      590  
 Yea, even that which Mischief meant most harm  
 Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.  
 But evil on itself shall back recoil,  
 And mix no more with goodness, when at last,  
 Gathered like scum, and settled to itself,                      595  
 It shall be in eternal restless change  
 Self fed and self-consumed    If this fail,  
 The pillared firmament is rottenness,  
 And earth's base built on stubble.    But come, let's on !  
 Against the opposing will and arm of Heaven                      600  
 May never this just sword be lifted up ,  
 But, for that damned magician, let him be girt  
 With all the grisly legions that troop  
 Under the sooty flag of Acheron,  
 Harpies and Hydras, or all the monstrous forms                      605  
 'Twixt Africa and Ind, I'll find him out,  
 And force him to return his purchase back,  
 Or drag him by the curls to a foul death,  
 Cursed as his life.

*Spirit*                      Alas ! good venturous youth,  
 I love thy courage yet, and bold emprise ,                      610  
 But here thy sword can do thee little stead  
 Far other arms and other weapons must  
 Be those that quell the might of hellish charms,  
 He with his bare wand can unthread thy joints,  
 And crumble all thy sinews

*Elder Brother*                      Why, prithee, shepherd,                      615  
 How durst thou then thyself approach so near  
 As to make this relation ?

*Spirit*                      Care and utmost shifts  
 How to secure the Lady from surprisal  
 Brought to my mind a certain shepherd lad,  
 Of small regard to see to, yet well skilled                      620  
 In every virtuous plant and healing herb  
 That spreads her verdant leaf to the morning ray  
 He loved me well, and oft would beg me sing ,  
 Which when I did, he on the tender grass  
 Would sit, and hearken even to ecstasy,                      625  
 And in requital ope his leathern scrip,  
 And show me simples of a thousand names,  
 Telling their strange and vigorous faculties,  
 Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,  
 But of divine effect, he culled me out                      630  
 The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,  
 But in another country, as he said,  
 Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil  
 Unknown, and like esteemed, and the dull swain  
 Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon ;                      635  
 And yet more med'cinal is it than that Moly  
 That Hermes once to wise Ulysses gave

He called it Hæmony, and gave it me,  
 And bade me keep it as of sovereign use  
 'Gainst all enchantments, mildew blast, or damp,      640  
 Or ghastly Furies' apparition  
 I pursed it up, but little reckoning made,  
 Till now that this extremity compelled.  
 But now I find it true , for by this means  
 I knew the foul enchanter, though disguised,      645  
 Entered the very lime twigs of his spells,  
 And yet came off    If you have this about you  
 (As I will give you when we go) you may  
 Boldly assault the necromancer's hall ,  
 Were if he be, with dauntless hardihood      650  
 And brandished blade rush on him , break his glass,  
 And shed the luscious liquor on the ground ,  
 But seize his wand    Though he and his cursed crew  
 Fierce sign of battle make, and menace high,  
 Or, like the sons of Vulcan, vomit smoke,      655  
 Yet will they soon retire, if he but shrink.

*Elder Brother*    Thyrsis, lead on apace , I'll follow thee ,  
 And some good angel bear a shield before us !

*The Scene changes to a stately palace, set out with all manner of  
 deliciousness , soft music , tables spread with all dainties  
 Comus appears with his rabble, and the LADY set in an  
 enchanted chair, to whom he offers his glass, which she  
 puts by, and goes about to rise*

*Comes*    Nay, lady, sit    If I but wave this wand,  
 Your nerves are all chained up in alabaster      660  
 And you a statue, or as Daphne was,  
 Root bound, that fled Apollo

*Lady.* Fool, do not boast  
 Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind  
 With all thy charms, although this corporal rind  
 Thou hast immanacled while Heaven secs good 665

*Comus* Why are you vexed, lady? why do you frown?  
 Here dwell no frowns, nor anger, from these gates  
 Sorrow flies far See, here be all the pleasures  
 That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts  
 When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns 670  
 Brisk as the April buds in primrose season  
 And first behold this cordial julep here,  
 That flames and dances in his crystal bounds  
 With spirits of balm and fragrant syrups mixed  
 Not that Nepenthes, which the wife of Ithone 675  
 In Egypt gave to Jove born Helena,  
 Is of such power to stir up joy as this,  
 To life so friendly, or so cool to thirst  
 Why should you be so cruel to yourself,  
 And to those dainty limbs, which Nature lent 680  
 For gentle usage and soft delicacy?  
 But you invert the covenants of her trust,  
 And harshly deal, like an ill borrower,  
 With that which you received on other terms,  
 Scorning the unexempt condition 685  
 By which all mortal frailty must subsist,—  
 Refreshment after toil, ease after pain,—  
 That have been tired all day without repast,  
 And timely rest have wanted But, fair virgin,  
 This will restore all soon

*Lady* 'Twill not, false traitor! 690  
 'Twill not restore the truth and honesty

That thou hast banished from thy tongue with lies  
 Was this the cottage and the safe abode  
 'Thou told'st me of? What grim aspects are these,  
 These oughly headed monsters? Mercy guard me ! 695  
 Hence with thy brewed enchantments, foul deceiver !  
 Hast thou betrayed my credulous innocence  
 With vizored falsehood and base forgery ?  
 And would'st thou seek again to trap me here  
 With liquorish baits, fit to ensnare a brute ? 700  
 Were it a draught for Juno when she banquets,  
 I would not taste thy treasonous offer None  
 But such as are good men can give good things ,  
 And that which is not good, is not delicious  
 I o a well governed and wise appetite. 705

*Comus* O foolishness of men ! that lend their ears  
 To those budge doctors of the Stoic fur,  
 And fetch their precepts from the Cynic tub,  
 Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence !  
 Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth 710  
 With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,  
 Covering the earth with odours, fruits, and flocks,  
 Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,  
 But all to please and sate the curious taste ?  
 And set to work millions of spinning worms, 715  
 That in their green shops weave the smooth haired silk,  
 To deck her sons , and, that no corner might  
 Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins  
 The hatched the all-worshipped ore and precious gems,  
 To store her children with If all the world 720  
 Should, in a pet of temperance, feed on pulse,  
 Drink the clear stream, and nothing wear but frieze,

The All giver would be unthanked, would be unpraised,  
 Not half his riches known, and yet despised,  
 And we should serve him as a grudging master, 725  
 As a penurious niggard of his wealth,  
 And live like Nature's bastards, not her sons,  
 Who would be quite surcharged with her own weight,  
 And strangled with her waste fertility  
 The earth cumbered, and the winged air darked with  
 plumes, 730  
 The herds would over multitude their lords,  
 The sea o'erfraught would swell, and the unsought  
 diamonds  
 Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,  
 And so bestud with stars, that they below  
 Would grow mured to light, and come at last 735  
 To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows  
 I st lady, be not coy, and be not cozened  
 With that same vaunted name, Virginity  
 Beauty is Nature's coin, must not be hoarded,  
 But must be current, and the good thereof 740  
 Consists in mutual and partaken bliss,  
 Unsavoury in the enjoyment of itself  
 If you let slip time, like a neglected rose  
 It withers on the stalk with languished head  
 Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown 745  
 In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities,  
 Whe e most may wonder at the workmanship  
 It is for homely features to keep home,—  
 They had their name thence, coarse complexions  
 And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply 750  
 The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool

What need of vermeil tinctured lip for that,  
 Love darting eyes, or tresses like the morn ?  
 There was another meaning in these gifts ,  
 Think what and be advised    you are but young yet    755

*Lady*    I had not thought to have unlocked my lips  
 In this unhallowed air, but that this juggler  
 Would think to charm my judgment, as mine eyes,  
 Obtruding false rules pranked in reason's garb  
 I hate when vice can bolt her arguments    760  
 And virtue has no tongue to check her pride —  
 Imposter ! do not charge most innocent Nature,  
 As if she would her children should be riotous  
 With her abundance    She, good cateress,  
 Means her provision only to the good,    765  
 That live according to her sober laws,  
 And holy dictate of spare Temperance  
 If every just man that now pines with want  
 Had but a moderate and beseeming share  
 Of that which lewdly pampered LUXURY    770  
 Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,  
 Nature's full blessings would be well dispensed,  
 In unsuperfluous even proportion,  
 And she no whit encumbered with her store ,  
 And then the Giver would be better thanked,    775  
 His praise due paid    for swinish gluttony  
 Ne'er looks to Heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,  
 But with besotted base ingratitude  
 Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder    Shall I go on ?  
 Or have I said enough ?    To him that dares    780  
 Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words  
 Against the sun clad power of chastity,

Fain would I something say,—yet to what end?  
 Thou hast nor ear, nor soul, to apprehend  
 The sublime notion and high mystery 785  
 That must be uttered to 'unfold the sage  
 And serious doctrine of Virginity,  
 And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know  
 More happiness than this thy present lot  
 Enjoy your dear wit and gay rhetoric, 790  
 That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence,  
 Thou art not fit to hear thyself convinced  
 Yet, should I try, the uncontrolled worth  
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits  
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence, 795  
 That dumb things would be moved to sympathise,  
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake,  
 Till all thy magic structures, reared so high,  
 Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head

*Comus* [Aside] She fables not, I feel that I do fear 800  
 Her words set off by some superior power,  
 And, though not mortal yet a cold shuddering dew  
 Dips me all o'er as when the wrath of Jove  
 Speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus  
 To some of Saturn's crew I must dissemble, 805  
 And try her yet more strongly—Come, no more!  
 This is mere moral babble, and direct  
 Against the canon laws of our foundation,  
 I must not suffer this, yet 'tis but the lees  
 And settlings of a melancholy blood 810  
 But this will cur all straight, one sip of this  
 Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight  
 Beyond the bliss of dreams Be wise, and taste.



*The BROTHERS rush in with swords drawn wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground his rout make sign of resistance, but are all driven in The ATTENDANT SPIRIT comes in*

*Spirit* What ! have you let the false enchanter scape ?  
 O ye mistook , ye should have snatched his wand, 815  
 And bound him fast Without his rod reversed,  
 And backward mutters of dissevering power,  
 We cannot free the Lady that sits here  
 In stony fetters fixed and motionless  
 Yet stay, be not disturbed , now I bethink me, 820  
 Some other means I have which may be used,  
 Which once of Melibœus old I learnt,  
 The soothest shephcrd that e'er piped on plains

There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,  
 That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream 825  
 Sabrina is her name a virgin pure ,  
 Whilom she was the daughter of Lochrine,  
 That had the sceptre from his father Brute  
 She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit  
 Of her enraged stepdame, Guendolen, 830  
 Commanded her fair innocence to the flood  
 That stayed her flight with his cross flowing course  
 The water nymphs, that in the bottom played,  
 Held up their pearly wrists and took her in,  
 Bearing her straight to aged Nereus' hall , 835  
 Who piteous of her woes, reared her lank head,  
 And gave her to his daughters to imbathe  
 In nectared lavers, strewed with asphodel,  
 And through the porch and inlet of each sense  
 Dropt in ambrosial oils, till she revived, 840

And underwent a quick immortal change,  
 Made Goddess of the river. Still she retains  
 Her maiden gentleness, and oft at eve  
 Visits the herds along the twilight meadows,  
 Helping all urchin blasts, and ill luck signs 845  
 That the shrewd meddling elf delights to make,  
 Which she with precious vial'd liquors heals  
 For which the shepherds, at their festivals,  
 Carol her goodness loud in rustic lays,  
 And throw sweet garland wreaths into her stream 850  
 Of pansies, pinks, and gaudy daffodils  
 And, as the old swain said she can unlock  
 The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell,  
 If she be right invoked in warbled song ,  
 For maidenhood she loves, and will be swift 855  
 To aid a virgin, such as was herself,  
 In hard'besetting need This will I try,  
 And add the power of some adjuring verse

*Song*

Sabrina fair,  
 Listen where thou art sitting 860  
 Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
 In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
 The loose train of thy amber dropping hair ,  
 Listen for dear honour's sake,  
 Goddess of the silver lake, 865  
 Listen and save !  
 Listen, and appear to us,  
 In name of great Oceanus ,  
 By the earth shaking Neptune's mace,  
 And Tethys' grave majestic pace , 870  
 By hoary Nereus' wrinkled look,

And the Carpathian wizard's hook ,  
 By scaly Triton's winding shell,  
 And old soothsaying Glaucus' spell ,  
 By Leucothea's lovely hands, 875  
 And her son that rules the strands ,  
 By Thetis' tinsel slippered feet,  
 And the songs of Sirens sweet ;  
 By dead Parthenope's dear tomb,  
 And fair Ligea's golden comb, 880  
 Wherewith she sits on diamond rocks,  
 Sleeking her soft alluring locks ,  
 By all the Nymphs that nightly dance  
 Upon thy streams with wily glance ,  
 Rise, rise, and heave thy rosy head 885  
 From thy coral paven bed,  
 And bridle in thy headlong wave,  
 Till thou our summons answered have  
 Listen and save !

*SABRINA rises, attended by Water nymphs, and sings*  
 By the rushy fringed bank, 890  
 Where grow the willow and the osier dank,  
 My sliding chariot stays,  
 Thick set with agate, and the azurn sheen  
 Of turkis blue, and emerald green,  
 That in the channel strays , 895  
 Whilst from off the waters fleet  
 Thus I set my printless feet  
 O'er the cowslip's velvet head,  
 That bends not as I tread,  
 Gentle swain, at thy request 900  
 I am here !  
*Spirit Goddess dear,*

We implore thy powerful hand  
 To undo the charmed band  
 Of true virgin here distressed, 905  
 Through the force and through the wile  
 Of unblessed enchanter vile.

*Sabrina* Shepherd, 'tis my office best  
 To help ensnared chastity  
 Brightest Lady, look on me 910  
 Thus I sprinkle on thy breast  
 Drops, that from my fountain pure  
 I have kept, of precious cure ,  
 Thrice upon thy finger's tip,  
 Thrice upon thy rubied lip 915  
 Next this marble venom'd seat,  
 Smeared with gums of glutinous heat,  
 I touch with chaste palms moist and cold.  
 Now the spell hath lost his hold ,  
 And I must haste ere morning hour 920  
 To wait in Amphitrite's bower

*SABRINA descends, and the LADY rises out of her seat*

*Spirit* Virgin, daughter of Locrine,  
 Sprung of old Anchises' line,  
 May thy brimmed waves for this  
 I heir full tribute never miss 925  
 From a thousand petty rills,  
 That tumble down the snowy hills  
 Summer drouth, or singéd air  
 Never scorch thy tresses fair,  
 Nor wet Octobers's torrent flood 930  
 Thy molten crystal fill with mud ,  
 May thy billows roll ashore  
 The beryl and the golden ore ,

May thy lofty head be crowned  
 With many a tower and terrace round, 935  
 And here and there thy banks upon  
 With groves of myrrh and cinnamon

Come, Lady , while Heaven lends us grace  
 Let us fly this curséd place,  
 Lest the sorcerer us entice 940  
 With some other new device

Not a waste or needless sound  
 Till we come to holier ground  
 I shall be your faithful guide  
 Through this gloomy covert wide , 945

And not many furlongs thence  
 Is your Father's residence,  
 Where this night are met in state  
 Many a friend to gratulate  
 His wished presence, and beside 950  
 All the swains that there abide

With jigs and rural dance resort  
 We shall catch them at their sport,  
 And our sudden coming there  
 Will double all their mirth and cheer 955

Come, let us haste , the stars grow high,  
 But Night sits monarch yet in the mid sky

*The Scene changes, presenting Ludlow Town and the President's  
 Castle , then come in Country Dancers , after them the  
 ATTENDANT SPIRIT, with the Two BROTHERS and the LADY*

*Song*

*Spirit* Back, shepherds, back ! Enough your play  
 Till next sunshine holiday  
 Here be, without duck or nod, 960

Other trippings to be trod  
 Of lighter toes, and such court guise  
 As Mercury did first devise  
 With the mincing Dryades  
 On the lawns and on the leas 965

*This second Song presents them to their  
 Father and Mother*

Noble Lord and Lady bright,  
 I have brought ye new delight  
 Here behold so goodly grown  
 I hree fair branches of your own  
 Heaven hath timely tried their youth, 970  
 Their faith, their patience, and their truth,  
 And sent them here through hard assays,  
 With a crown of deathless praise,  
 To triumph in victorious dance  
 O'er sensual folly and intemperance 975

*The dances ended, the SPIRIT epiloguizes*

*Spirit* To the ocean now I fly,  
 And those happy climes that lie  
 Where day never shuts his eye,  
 Up in the broad fields of the sky  
 There I suck the liquid air, 980  
 All amidst the gardens fair  
 Of Hesperus, and his daughters three  
 That sing about the golden tree  
 Along the crisped shades and bowers  
 Revels the spruce and jocund Spring, 985  
 The Graces and the rosy bosomed Hours  
 Thither all their bounties bring  
 There eternal Summer dwells,

And west winds with musky wing  
 About the cedarn alleys fling 990  
 Nard and cassia's balmy smells  
 Iris there with humid bow  
 Waters the odorous banks, that blow  
 Flowers of more mingled hue  
 'T han her purpled scarf can shew, 995  
 And drenches with Elysian dew  
 (List, mortals, if your ears be true)  
 Beds of hyacinth and roses,  
 Where young Adonis oft reposes,  
 Waxing well of his deep wound, 1000  
 In slumber soft, and on the ground  
 Sadly sits the Assyrian queen  
 But far above, in spangled sheen,  
 Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced,  
 Holds his dear Psyche, sweet entranced 1005  
 After her wandering labours long,  
 'Till free consent the gods among  
 Make her his eternal bride,  
 And from her fair unspotted side  
 Two blissful twins are to be born, 1010  
 Youth and Joy, so Jove hath sworn  
  
 But now my task is smoothly done,  
 I can fly, or I can run  
 Quickly to the green earth's end,  
 Where the bowed welkin slow doth bend, 1015  
 And from thence can soar as soon  
 To the corners of the moon  
 Mortals, that would follow me,  
 Love Virtue, she alone is free

She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery chime ;  
Or, if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

1020





# NOTES.

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## STAGE DIRECTION

**Discovers**—exhibits, displays

**The attendant spirit**—This character was acted by Henry Lawes (see Introduction) The Attendant Spirit serves a double purpose On the one hand he is the supernatural guardian of the lady and her brothers, sent to guide and protect them, and so symbolises the Divine help that is given to virtue in its struggle with temptation, (cf the last two lines of the poem —

“Or if virtue feeble were,

Heaven itself would stoop to her”)

On the other hand he serves the purpose of the Chorus in Greek plays in this prologue, by explaining to the audience the situation and hinting at the development of the plot of the play

**Descends**—probably the scene on the stage represented a wood with a hill rising in the back ground, down which the Attendant Spirit comes

Lines 1—92 [Write a brief summary in simple prose of the opening speech of the Attendant Spirit]

1 **Starry threshold of Jove's Court**—i.e., on the borders of Heaven (the starry sky close to the dwelling of the king of the gods)—The mythology of the whole poem is classical, hence the use of Jove (Jupiter) for God

**Those**—implying that the reference is to something well known **Shapes**—“Of all the poets who have introduced into

their works the agency of supernatural beings, Milton has succeeded best" (Macaulay) In his "Paradise Lost" his angels are not pure spirit, nor yet mere matter, but etherialised matter The use of the word "shapes" is also in accordance with Milton's habit of leaving supernatural things more or less vague and undefined, to produce a mysterious effect He endows these beings with personality, without making them too definite

3 **Ærial spirits**—dwelling in the air **Inspired**—"sphere," "sphery," "insphere," and "unsphere," are always used by Milton with reference to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, according to which the apparent movements of the stars were explained by a theory of eight concentric and revolving crystal spheres So here he means these particular spirits were placed in one of these heavenly spheres.

4 **Calm and serene**—*calm* = peaceful (antithetical to "stir") *serene* (accent on first syllable) = bright, unclouded (antithetical to "smoke")

5 **Dim spot**—*i e*, from the point of view of a spirit looking down from heaven

6 **Low-thoughted care**—*i e*, anxiety about low and mean objects

(There are two attributive clauses —*viz*, (1)—"which men call Earth," and (2) (in which) (men) strive etc.)

7 This line qualifies "men"—**pestered** = fastened, (from *impetret*, to shackle a horse by the foot) **pin fold** (shortened from *pin fold*, same as *pound fold*) an enclosure, *cf* to *impound*, sheep *fold* etc., so the line means, "crowded together in this confined space, the Earth"—

8—9 *i e*, Men spend all their time in feverishly striving to maintain existence, and forget their higher destiny (*Cf*

the allegory in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" of the "man with the muck rake"—"A man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck rake, but the man did neither look up, nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and the dust of the floor"—)

9 **Crown**—not the royal crown, but the garland or wreath of leaves put on the head of the victor in the Olympic games—often used as a metaphor in the New Testament for the reward of the good life (*cf* 2 Tim 4 8, 1 Cor 9 25)

10 **This mortal change**—death. Either (1) the change from this mortal life (to immortality) or (2) this change which is characteristic of all mortals (human kind)

11 **Enthroned gods**—*cf* Rev 4 4 (New Testament) "And upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments, and on their heads crowns of gold" **Sainted**—hallowed, holy (Note the mingling of Christian allusions with classical mythology)

12 **Yet some**—*sc*, although in general men seem to be exclusively occupied in worldly pursuits, yet there are some who aspire to spiritual and immortal things **Due steps**—by the steps that are due, or appointed (*sc*, by the necessary and proper means)

13 **To lay their just hands** = to lay their hands justly (or with justice) that is, *of right* **Golden key**—*cf* Matt 16 19 (New Testament) "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," Christ's words to his disciple Peter, and Lycidas, 110—11 —

"Two massy keys he bore of metals twain,  
The *golden* opens, the iron shuts amain"

(The phrase simply means that some will gain the *right* to eternal life)

15 **But for such**—*sc*, if it were not for such people

16 **Ambrosial**—literally “undying”—hence, “heavenly” (The food of the gods was called ambrosia) **Weeds**—garments (used now only of “widow’s weeds,” mourning *cf* below, line 83, “sky robes”)

17 **Sin-worn**—worn with sin    **Mould** = earth

18 **But to my task**—but I must explain my business here (but (I must apply myself) to my task)

19 **Every**        **each** *sc*, *Every*        **every**—(*cf* line 311)

20 **Took in by lot etc**—When Saturn (Kronos), the old king of the gods in Greek mythology, was deposed, his universal rule was divided between his three sons, Zeus (Jupiter) took the sky (hence “high” Jove), Pluto (Hades) took the subterranean regions of the dead (hence, “‘nether’ (lower) Jove”), and Neptune (Poseidon) took the sea and the sea girt islands *cf* Homer’s *Iliad* XV Poseidon (Neptune) says, “Three brethren are we, and sons of Kronos, whom Rhea bore, Zeus and myself and Hades the third, the ruler of the folk in the under world And in three lots are all things divided, and each drew a domain of his own, and to me fell the hoary sea, to be my habitation for ever, when we shook the lots, and Hades drew the murky darkness, and Zeus the wide heaven in clear air and clouds, but the earth and the high Olympus are yet common to all”

23 **Unadorned bosom of the deep**—*sc*, otherwise unadorned, without the islands the sea would be bare (Shakes

peare speaks of England as "a precious stone set in a silver sea" *Rich II Act 2 Sc 1 46* )

24 **To grace**—*i e*, in order to shew favour to **Tributary gods**—lesser deities ruling under his authority (owing him *tribute*)

25 **By course, etc**—"in regular distribution" he commits to each lessor deity his separate government **Several**—separate, distinct

26 **Sapphire crowns**—sapphire, a precious stone of a deep blue colour the right colour for deities of the blue sea

27 **Trident**—A three pronged spear, the traditional sign of authority of Neptune **Little**—because these gods were only viceroys of Neptune **This Isle**—great Britain

28 **Main**—the ocean, the high seas (lit the *main, principal* (sea))

29 **Quarters**—divides into separate districts **Blue-haired deities**—*cf* above, *sapphire crowns* These must be different from the "tributary gods" *cf* line 24, or else there is no special compliment to "this Isle" Unless the compliment is that, whereas all other isles had each its ruler, ("several government"), this one is so great that it has to be divided amongst several rulers

30 **Fronts the falling sun**—*i e*, faces the west (*i e*, Wales)

31 **A noble Peer**—the Earl of Bridgewater appointed in 1633 "Lord President of the Council in the Principality of Wales and the Marches of the same" Besides Wales, he administered the four English counties of Gloucester, Worcester, Hereford and Shropshire **Mickle trust**—much (great) integrity (*Mickle* and *muckle*, are still used in Scotch for much)

32 **Tempered awe**—sternness moderated by concilitation and tact (“the iron hand in the velvet glove”)

33 **An old and haughty nation**—the Welsh **Old**—because the direct descendants of the Keltic Britons who conquered “this isle” about 500 B C **Haughty (and) proud in arms**—as the Romans, Saxons, and later the English under Edward I, found to their cost

34 **His fair offspring**—His children, namely Alice, the youngest daughter, who acted in *Comus* as *The Lady*, John, Viscount Brackley (the *Elder Brother*), and Thomas Egerton (the *Second Brother*) **Nursed in princely lore**—brought up like princes, (*lore*, cognate with *learn*, *learning*)

35 **Their father's state**—the actual ceremonies performed at his installation

36 **New-intrusted sceptre**—authority newly conferred, *new intrusted*, is an adjective made up of an adverb (new = newly) and participle)

37 **Perplexed**—used in its literal sense of interwoven, and so entangled (accent here on first syllable)

38 **Horror**—literally *shagyness, roughness, ruggedness*, from Lat *Horrere*, to *bristle* (cf., line 429) Hence comes the secondary and more usual meaning of the feeling produced by what is rough and rugged horror Here the two meanings are combined (1) the rough, rugged, bristling nodding trees, (2) and the feelings of fear and dread they inspire **Shady brows** bushes over hanging the paths like eye brows overhanging the eyes

39 **Threats**—old form of *threatens* **Forlorn**—literally, lost, forsaken **Passenger**—traveller

41 **But that** = unless I had been **Sovran**—Milton's

spelling of *sovereign* It is etymologically to be preferred for the word comes from Lat *superanum* (chief), and has no connection with "reign"

45 **And listen why—***sc*, I was despatched **For I will tell etc**—that is, the plot of the masque is original, and is not to be found in any ancient or modern song or tale that was recited either in the hall (of the castle, where the men gathered) or the bower (ladies' chambers)

46–58 Milton often uses genealogy to symbolise some truth (e.g., in *L'Allegro* he represents Melancholy as the child of Cerberus and Midnight, but in *Il Penseroso* as the child of Vesta (goddess of the hearth, or home) and Saturn (signifying solitude) while Mirth is the child of Venus (Love) and Bacchus (wine etc) Here he wishes to represent in the person of Comus *sensual pleasure* in its most *attractive and enchanting form* For the subject of the masque is the victory of Purity and Reason over Pleasure and Enchantment Comus, therefore, is described as the son of Bacchus, the *wine god*, and Circe the *sorceress*

46 **Bacchus**—the Greek Dionysus, the god of wine

48 **After the Tuscan mariners transformed—***ie*, "after the transformation of the Tuscan mariners" a Latin construction, being a passive participle combined with a substantive, (corresponding to an English verbal or abstract noun connected with another noun by the preposition *of*) (Cf, e.g., "since created man" (Par Lost I 573) = since the creation of man)

The reference is to a story told by Ovid (*Metamorphoses* iii), in which Bacchus is said to have hired a vessel belonging to some pirates of Iyrihene (Etruria or Tuscany the modern Tuscany) to carry him to Nasos The pirates, however, steered towards

Asia, in order to sell him there as a slave, so he turned the oars and mast of the ship into serpents, and the sailors into dolphins

49 **As the winds list**—at the pleasure of the winds (*cf* *John* 3 8, New Testament “the wind bloweth where it *listeth*”) *List* is akin to *lust* (desire)

50 **On Circe's island fell**—This visit of Bacchus to Circe is Milton's own invention and is not found in classical mythology (*cf* the description of Ulysses' visit in the *Odyssey* (X) “And we came to the isle *Aëta*, where dwelt Circe of the braided tresses, and awful goddess of mortal speech, own sister to the wizard *Aetes*’—Circe was a powerful enchantress who dwelt in *Aëta*, off the coast of Latium, and was the daughter of Helios (the sun) and the sea nymph Perse

**Fell**—happened upon, came to **Who knows not**—this interrogative clause abruptly introduced is an example of the figure of speech called *anadiplosis* (=doubling back)

51 **Charmed cup**—*ie*, wine in the cup rendered magical incantation **Lost his upright shape**—Circe changed men and women into swine in outward form, though they retained their human mind and consciousness

56 **Ivy berries**—the ivy as well as the vine, was sacred to Bacchus **His blithe youth**—*ie*, his fresh young figure

57 **But his mother more**—*ie*, but more like his mother, emphasising the enchanting and plausible aspect of sensual pleasure

58 **Comus**—the word means literally “revel” or merry making (Gk *komos*), and is cognate to *Comedy*. In classical literature Comus is a very insignificant figure, and when he does appear he stands for mere gluttony or drunkenness. In Ben Jonson (“Pleasure reconciled to virtue”) he is simply “the



Belly " in Massenger he is the " the god of pleasure " in Dekker he is " the clerk of gluttony's kitchen " The nearest approach to Milton's Comus is the Comus of Elycius Pyteanus, " a graceful reveller, the genius of love and cheerfulness " (See Introduction) But the Comus of Milton is practically the creation of his own imagination, and represents not merely sensual pleasure but also the misuse of the intellect on behalf of falsehood and impurity—the specious and plausible philosophy that makes wrong appear right and " the worse appear the better reason " His magic cup drugs the conscience, and his " magic dust " deludes the reason As Prof Masson says, " For the purpose of his masque at Tudlow Castle he was bold enough to add a brand new god, no less, to the classic Pantheon, and to import him into Britain "

59 *z e*, mature and gay on account of his well developed manhood **Frolie**=frolicsome gay, merry

60 **Celtic and Iberian fields**—*z e* France (ancient Gaul) and Spain (implying that this kind of polished and plausible but sensual pleasure, characteristic of the Cavalier party, was imported from the Continent)

61 **Betakes him**—*Him* is reflexive (=himself) **Ominous**—literally, full of omens or portents

65 **Orient**—lit eastern (because the place of the rising sun) so *bright, shining* (From Latin, *oriator* to rise)

66 **The drouth of Phœbus**—*z e*, the thirst due to the heat of the sun (Phœbus is Apollo, the sun god) (*Drouth*, generally spelt *drought*) **Which**—(antecedent="liquor")

67 **Fond**—foolish (the secondary sense is "affection etc")  
**Intemperate**=uncontrolled

68 **Soon as the potion works**—*z e*, as soon as the

drink takes effect (Potion=<sup>a</sup> drink, specially, a medicated or poisonous draught)

69 **The express resemblance of the gods**—(*cf* “The human face divine”) See Gen 1 27 (old Testament), “so God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him”

71 **Ounce**—*Felis uncia*, the Snow Leopard, allied to the panther, cheetah, and leopard

72 **All other parts** *etc*—in the Odyssey, the victims of Circe are entirely transformed into brutes, but retain their human intelligence here the victims of Comus become only partially brutish in body, but wholly brutish in mind (Milton probably changed only the heads for stage reasons the actors would only have to put on appropriate masks to agree with the words of the poem) (This line is an example of the absolute construction,—a Latinism)

77 **To roll** *etc*—adverbial clause to *forget* **Sensual sty**—like swine

79 **Adventurous**—full of risks (The word is used now generally with persons, meaning “enterprising”) **Glade**—an open space in a wood—hence, the wood itself

80 **Glancing star**—shooting star, meteor *cf* *Par Lost*, IV 556

——“Swift as a shooting star

In autumn thwarts the night”

81 **Convoy**—escort **To convoy** (same as *convey*) is generally used of ships of war accompanying merchant ships as a guard

83 **Sky-rob**—*cf* “ambrosial weeds,” line 16 **Iris’ woof**—Iris was the goddess of the Rainbow *woof* (connected

with *web*, *weave*, and contracted for *on wef* = "on web" (i.e., the cross threads laid on the warp of a loom). So the "sky robes" were "made of material dyed in rainbow colours"

84 **Weeds**—see note, line 16 **Swain**—peasant, countryman

85 **That to the service**—when it is remembered that Henry Lawes acted the part of the "attendant spirit" and so spoke these words and that he was musical instructor to the Bridgewater family, the appropriateness of these words will be seen

86 **Who, with soft pipe etc**—a compliment to Lawes, the musician **Smooth-dittied** = sweetly worded (*Ditty*, from Lat. *Dictatum*, "said")

87 **Well knows to still etc**—i.e., well knows *how* to still etc

86—88 Note the alliteration, helping the expression of the sense

88—91 **Nor of less faith etc**—i.e., he is not less in faith (faithfulness) than in musical skill (i.e., he is as faithful as he is musical) and from the nature of his occupation (i.e., since as a shepherd he has to watch his flocks on the hills), he is best qualified ("likeliest") and closest at hand to give the assistance that this occasion requires

92 **Viewless** - invisible

*Stage Direction*—(The Attendant Spirit now leaves the stage, and Comus and his followers rush in) **Charming-rod** = a magic wand, such as enchanters use (See line 659) **His glass**—(see line 66, and lines 811 13 etc) **Rout**—rabble, disorderly crowd **Glistening**—glistening sparkling (perhaps, in the play, covered with silver tinsel)

93—144 Notice the change of metre The speech of

the Attendant Spirit, as treating of serious matters, was in stately and grave blank verse (lines 1—92), (Iambic Pentameter) Now the lines are shorter (Ictameters or *Eight* syllabled), and rhymed in couplets. This light and brisk metre corresponds well to the description of frivolous pleasures which the enchanter now gives

93 “**The star fold**”—the planet Venus, called *Hesperus* the evening star when appearing after sunset, and *Phosphorus* or *Lucifer*, the morning star, when appearing just before dawn. **Fold**—*ie*, fold, or pen, his sheep *ie*, when the shepherd sees the evening star he knows it is time to make his flock safe for the night

94 **Top of heaven** *etc*—*ie*, is high up in the sky, far above the horizon

95 **Gilded ear of day**—*Phœbus* or *Apollo*, the sun god, was supposed to ride in a golden chariot across the sky every day

96 **His glowing axle doth allay**—the axle of the sun’s chariot is supposed to be burning hot with the journey—*cf* *Nativity Ode*, Stanza VII

“He ‘ (the sun) ’ saw a greater sun appear

Than his bright throne or burning axle tree could bear ’

**Allay**—quench, cool. **His**=its. *Its* is a modern possessive, only introduced about the 17th cent

97 “**Steep Atlantic steam**”—The ancients regarded the ocean as a great river flowing round the earth hence “stream”. The attribute “steep” is a correct description of the appearance the sea often has to one standing on the shore *cf* *Tennyson* (*Progress of Spring*) “The slant seas leaning on the mangrove copse”

98 **Slope sun**—sloped, or sloping It means “the sun sunk below the horizon so that the only rays visible shoot up into the sky” (Bell)

99 **Dusky pole**—the upper sky (where the Pole Star is) already becoming dark dusky, as the sun sets (Milton first wrote *northern* instead of *dusky*)

100—101 **Pacing East**—The ancients, believing the sun to go round the earth, supposed it to journey during the night under the earth to the East, where it rose again the next morning (*Other goal*—is the West was the goal of the sun’s day journey, the East was the goal of its night journey)

(Lines 93 101—A poetic way of saying that it was evening—the day was over and the night had come)

102 [Compare and contrast the spirit of lines 102—144 with that of *L’Allegro* 25 40—The guilty pleasures of the one, and the healthy and innocent mirth of the other]

105 **Braid your locks with rosy twine**—wreath your hair with garlands of roses, (roses entwined together)

106 **Dropping wine**—i.e., the garlands of roses give forth fragrance and are wet with wine, sprinkled on them

107—110 **Rigour, Advice, Age, Severity** are personified abstractions **Rigour**—strictness in conduct **Advice**—deliberation ‘**With scrupulous head**’—with head full of scruples, conscientious (**Saws**—sayings, maxims)

111 **Of purer fire**—i.e., having a higher, or divine nature (Plato, and the Stoics, believed that pure fire was the constituent element of all divine objects, including the stars)

112 **The starry quire** (Choir)—Pythagoras supposed that the planets gave forth musical sounds which formed a celes

tial harmony, inaudible under ordinary circumstances to men—the “music of the spheres” of Shakespeare, “*Merchant of Venice*”—V 1 61

There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest,  
But in his motion like an angel sings  
Still quiring to the young eyed cherubims, etc

113 **Nightly watchful spheres**—(nightly=nocturnal, not here the ordinary sense of “night by night”) The stars are supposed to keep watch at night like sentinels of Milton's *Nativity Ode*—‘And all the spungled host keep watch in order bright’, and Campbell's line, “The sentinel stars set their watch in the skies”

114 **Lead in swift round etc—i.e.**, with their music they lead the months and years in a regular, ordered dance i.e., the months and years dance quickly to their music

115 **Sounds**—straits of the sea **Finny drove**—crowd of fishes

116 **Now to the moon etc—i.e.**, as affected by the moon **Morrice**, morris, or *Moonish* dance brought into Spain by the Moors, thence introduced into England (The restless surface of the sea, flashing in the moonlight, gives it the appearance of dancing)

117 **Tawny**—of a yellowish colour (like *tanned* leather *tawny* and *tan* from the same root) often applied to the tiger **Shelves**—flat ledges of rock

118 **Pert**—lively (a form of *perl*, smart) In modern English it means “impertinent” **Dapper**—in its original sense of small and active (now means clean and neat, especially in dress)

119 **Dimpled brook**—a dimple is a small depression or indentation (the word is akin to *dip*, *deep*) in the face or

chin, which appears when one smiles, counted a mark of beauty So here the surface of the brook, marked by little eddies and swirls as it flows along, is likened to a smiling face

120 **Trim**—neat, tidy—applied more appropriately in *L'allegro*, 75, to meadows, ("Meadows *trim*, and daisies pied"), and in *Il penseroso* to gardens (*Il pens* 50 "*trim* gardens")

121 **Wakes**—lit night watches so, an evening merry making

124 **Venus**—the goddess of love (*Wakens*, transitive, governing *love*)

125 **Rights**—*i e*, *rites*—ceremonies

126 'Tis only daylight **sin**—*i e*, by revealing it, according to Comus, the only sin is the "sin" of being found out Cf Ben Jonson —

"'Tis no sin love's fruit to steal,  
But the sweet to reveal,  
To be taken, to be seen,  
These have crimes accounted been "

127 **Dun shades**—dark, smoky shades

129 **Cotytto**—a goddess worshipped in Thiac, whose festival, called Cotytia, was observed at night ("dark veiled") with licentious orgies

130 **Called**—invoked by the worshippers

130 1 **The dragon womb gloom**—Night (*Stygian darkness*) is figured as a monster (*dragon*) of Hell (*Stygian*) that gives birth to (*womb*, *spets*) gloom as a positive thing **Stygian**—adj from Styx (=abhorred), the chief river of the Greek Hell **Spets**, *i e*, spits ejects The general meaning is,—this goddess is invoked only at the darkest hour of the night

132 **One blot**—a universal blot *i.e.*, the air becomes one indistinguishable mass of darkness **Stay**—check

133 **Ebon**—*i.e.*, as black as ebony, a wood of a very dark colour (**Cloudy ebon chair**—Cotytto seems to be thought of riding on a dark cloud as in a chariot, or on a throne)

135 **Hecat'**—a goddess of Thrace (and so a suitable companion to Cotytto), and "the mistress of witches" (and so a fit patroness of Comus)

136—7 **Till utmost end** *etc*—full completion (*i.e.*, till we have performed all your rites completely) **Thy vowed priests**—priests who are bound by *vows* to serve her, *devotees*

138—142 "Milton represents Morning as concealed in a cabin or hut on the summit of the eastern mountains, and looking out through a loop hole or narrow window in it, to try if she can discover anything of what has been going on during the night, in order to give information to the sun" (Keightley)

138 **Blabbing eastern scout**—the tale telling spy that comes from the East *i.e.*, the Morning (which will reveal what "these dun shades will ne'er report"—*Cf* line 126 7)

139 **Nice**—fastidious, hard to please, at once *curious* and *squeamish* Used here by Comus in contempt **The Indian steep** *i.e.*, the Himalayas the far East from Europe In his *Elgia Tertia* Milton represents the sun as "the light bringing king" whose home is on the shores of the Ganges (*i.e.*, in the East)

140 **Cabined loop-hole**—'cabined,' *i.e.*, 'belonging to a cabin,' and so *small* The faint light of the early dawn, peeping through lines of cloud, suggests some one looking through a small window (*Cf* Gray's "peep of dawn" "Elegy"), *cf* "out of her window close she blushing peeps," said of the morning (P Fletcher *Eclogues*)



141 **Tell tale sun**—Helios (the sun) is said in the *Odyssey* (VIII) to have kept watch and informed Vulcan of the amours of his (Vulcan's) wife, Venus, with Mars—*cf* 'Spenser, *Brit Ida*, II 3

"The thick looked boughs shout out the *tell tale sun*,  
For Venus hated his *all blabbing light* '—

**Descry**—generally now means to *see*, *discern* here in its original sense of *describe*, *report*

142 **Solemnity**—ceremony

144 **Light fantastic round**—'Round'=dance or measure, in which the dancers join hands "Fantastic"=full of fancy, unrestrained

**Stage direction**—*The Measure*—*i e*, the dance Comus and his companions join in a dance on the stage, which is described in the Cambridge draft of the Masque as "the measure, in a wild, rude and wanton Antic"—Comus interrupts this dance as he perceives the approach of "the Lady," and again speaks Note the change back again to blank verse, to suit the change of temper and subject

145 **Break off**—*i e*, stop dancing **Different pace**—*i e*, different from the pace of the "fantastic round"

146 **Chaste footing**—*i e*, the tread of some chaste person

147 **Shrouds**—coverts, hiding places—(now used of the winding sheet of the dead) **Brakes**—thickets (akin to *bracken*, a tall English fern that grows thickly in woods and on moors)

148 **Some virgin sure**—supply, "It is" **Sure**—adverb (surely)

1501 **Now to my charms trains**—*i e*, now I will betake myself to my, etc (*cf* "But to my task," line 18)

**Wily**=full of *wiles* (same as *guile*) **Trains**=artifices or snares

153 4 **Thus I hurl, etc**—perhaps on the stage the actor who represented Comus here threw some powder into the air (In the original draft among the Cambridge MSS the phrase is *powdered spells*, instead of *dazzling*) **Spongy air**—because it sucks up and retains the “magic dust” like a sponge

155 **Of power**—attributive to spells **Blar illusion**—*i e*, illusion that deceives by *blurring* the vision (*blar* and *blur* are akin *cf* “blear eyed,” meaning dim of sight)

156 **Presentments**—appearances (from Lat *praesens*, being before not “presentiment,” which means “foreboding,” from Lat *praesentire*) **Quaint habits**—strange, unfamiliar dress

158 **Suspicious flight**—flight caused by suspicion

159 **Against my course**—against my custom or purpose

160—4 Comus says his method of getting a person into his power is to make a pretence of the greatest friendship and thus to get into the confidence of the unsuspecting victim with courteous words and plausible arguments **Ends**—intentions **Glozing**—flattering (from old English *glose*, meaning a *gloss*, or explanation) **Baited**—furnished with a *bait*, like a fish hook so, “rendered attractive”) **Wind me, (me, reflexive)** and **hug**—suggesting the insinuating approach and crushing grasp of a serpent like the boa constrictor

165 **Virtue**—*i e*, power or influence

167 **Whom thrift keeps up etc**—*i e*, whom careful economy keeps occupied with his country business even at this late hour **Gear** literally, “preparation” so, business, property (now used of apparatus, or furniture)

168 **Fairly**—here, softly

169 In the Edition of 1673, there is a direction in the errata to omit the comma after "may," and change "here" into "hear"—hence,

"And hearken, if I may her business hear"

But the reading of the text (which is that that of 1637 and 1645) seems preferable

*(Comus here goes off the stage)*

170—229 [Summarise the Lady's speech in simple prose]

171 **My best guide now**—attributive to *ear* : *e*, her eyes being useless in the darkness, she must trust to her ears

**Methought**—*i e*, it seemed to me

173 **Jocund**—merry **Gamesome**—lively

174 **Loose unlettered hinds**—uncontrolled ignorant farm servants

175 **For their teeming, etc**—*For* on account of, *Teeming* prolific, and stocked to overflowing (*To teem*=to be pregnant, to bring forth young) **Granges**=granaries, barns

176 **Pan**—the god of nature especially of all connected with pastoral life

177 **And thank the gods amiss**—Puritan Milton would naturally hold that wanton revelry was an improper way of thanking God

178 **Swilled insolence**—rudeness caused by drunkenness (*swill*, is to drink greedily,—like a pig)

179 **Wassailers**—revellers (*Wassail*, a drinking bout from Anglo Saxon, *waes hale*, "be hale," (be well), "health to you," a salutation said when drinking another's health)

(171—179 Referring to such festivals as the "Harvest-home" etc, when the farmers rejoiced over the gathering in of their harvest, with feasting and drinking and rough merry making)

180 **Inform**—direct **Unacquainted feet**—my feet that do not know the way

184 **Spreading favour**—transferred epithet, from cause (branches of the pines) to effect (favour) The spreading branches of the pines showed these travellers favour by giving them shade and shelter

187 **Kind hospitable woods**—an example of what Ruskin calls the “pathetic fallacy,” which attributes human feelings to inanimate things

188—190 Evening is compared to a serious pilgrim, clad in grey hood and sober coloured garments, setting out on pilgrimage Masson says, “If this fine image is optically realised, what we see is evening succeeding day, as the figure of a venerable grey hooded mendicant might slowly follow the wheels of some rich man’s chariot”

189 **A sad votarist in palmer’s weed**—A *votarist* is one who is bound by a *vow* (Lat *votum*) modern form, “votary” **Palmer**—a pilgrim, who carried a palm branch in token of having fulfilled a vow to go to Palestine, the Holy Land **Weed**—garment (see line 16)

190 **From the hindmost weels** etc —**Phoebus wain**—the chariot of the sun *wain*, akin to waggon As the sun sets in the west, the “hindmost wheels” of his chariot will be towards the *East* so the meaning of the figure is that the darkness of evening gathers in the eastern sky as the sun sinks in the west

192 **Labour**—burden

193 **Engaged**—committed (to *engage* is to bind by a *gage*, or pledge)

194 **Envious darkness**—(pathetic fallacy again) the darkness is conceived as envying the Lady the possession of two such brothers

195 **Had stole**—for, *stolen* **Else**—otherwise (the meaning is, that if darkness did not mean to steal them out of envy, why has night shut off the light of the stars? *i. e.*, night has shut off the stars to help darkness in stealing, etc)  
**Thievish night**—(pathetic fallacy)

196 **Some felonious end**—some criminal purpose

197 **Dark lantern**—a lantern fitted with a metal slide which can be turned so as totally to conceal the light

198—9 Construction irregular in syntax “That Nature hung in heaven,” is a relative clause co ordinate in *sense* with the next clause, and the following clause should read “and whose lamps she filled,” etc

199 **Due light**—light *due*, or *owing* to the traveller

195—200 The idea of the passage is, that Nature has hung the stars in the sky to be a permanent source of guidance to travellers, but Night has shut the light off, as one does with a dark lantern, so that the brothers might be stolen

203 **Rife**—prevalent **Perfect**—distinct

204 **Single darkness**—darkness only

205 **What might this be?**—A direct question about a past event “what was this likely to be?” “What could this be?”

205—209 A famous passage, spoken of by Lowell as “that wonderful passage in *Comus* of the airy tongues, perhaps the most imaginative in suggestion he ever wrote”—“The Lady here says that she began to think of all the weird stories of supernatural sights and sounds she had ever heard or read of” (Browne)

205 **Fantasies**—fancies

207 **Calling shapes, etc**—“Such words as “shapes,” “shadows,” “airy tongues?” etc ‘illustrate Milton’s power to

create an indefinite yet expressive picture" (Bell) **Beckoning shadows dire**—an example of what Earle calls the "ambidextral (two handed) adjective" *Cf* line 470, "gloomy shadows damp" and 945, "gloomy covert wide"

208 **Syllable**—pronounce

210 **May startle well**—may well startle

212 **Siding champion**—"To side" is to take one's side, so to assist *assisting* **Conscience**—pronounced as a trisyllable

213—15 The Lady, deprived of all human aid, but strong because of a clear conscience, relies on spiritual powers, and summons as angels to her help Faith, Hope and Chastity (Note the significant substitution of chastity for charity, in St Paul's famous trio (1 Corinth 13) "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, and the greatest of these is charity")

213 **Pure-eyed Faith**—*pure eyed* is a very fitting epithet for *faith*, which is a kind of spiritual power of vision whose clearness depends upon sincerity of motive and purity of heart *Cf* St Paul, (2 Cor 4 16 and 18) "Wherefore we faint not while *we look* not at the things which are seen, but *at the things that are not seen*," and Christ's words, (Matt 5 8) "Blessed are the *pure* in heart, for they shall *see* God" **White handed Hope**—as the *eye* (vision) is the symbol of faith, the *hand* (helpfulness) is the symbol of Hope and the "hand" of Hope is "white" (clean), as the eye of faith is "pure," and the form of Chastity is "unblemished" According to the Hebrew psalmist, only "He that hath *clean hands* and a *pure heart*" can enter God's presence Psalm 24 4

214 **Hovering angel etc**—Hope hovers as a golden-winged angel to protect her (*To hover* is to hang fluttering in the air on the wing, as a mother bird above the nest

where her young ones are *cf* the beautiful description of God's care of Israel, under the figure of an eagle —(Deut 32 11 "As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young, He spread abroad His wings," etc )

216 I see **ye** visibly—*i e*, you are *real* to me, living presences, not mere shapes of the imagination (*Ye*—is properly nominative, *you* being the correct objective but the usage was loose among the Elizabethans, and with Milton)

219<sup>~</sup> **Glistening guardian**—a shining angel to guard—*cf* Psalms, 90 "He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways"

(216—220 The Lady's own Faith, Hope and Chastity are so real to her as to confirm her belief that God, who is the supreme good, has her in His keeping, and that He uses even evil as the instrument for accomplishing His blessed will (*Cf* Bible—"surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee" Psalm 76 10)

221 **Was I deceived, etc**—just as she reaches this triumphant conclusion of faith, she sees a gleam of moonlight through a rift in the black cloud, and takes it as a sign of God's care and favour **Sable**—black

222 **Silver lining**—*cf* the proverb, "Every cloud has a silver lining" (The metaphor is that of a black coat lined inside with white or silver cloth this side the cloud is dark, but the other side it is moon lit and bright, hence, the silver lining is a reason for *hope*)

223—4 The repetition forcibly expresses the strong confidence of hope and faith (**Her**—its)

226 **Hallo**—also spelt *halloo*, *halloa*, and *holloa*—shout (French, *ho !* and *là* (there))

227 **Make to be heard**—cause to be heard

228 **New-enlivened spirits**—my spirits that have been newly enlivened (Her heart had been encouraged afresh by the sight of the silver lined cloud)

229 **Prompt me**—i.e., to call to my brothers **They**—the brothers

230—243 **The song**—the Lady sings this song in order to attract the attention of her brothers The address to Echo is appropriate in a double sense for she wishes to rouse the echoes of the wood to attract the brothers' notice and to appeal to the nymph Echo whose loss of her beloved Narcissus she compares to her own

Songs addressed to Echo were favourite devices in Masques, because they gave such opportunities for musical effects on the stage

(The Songs in *Comus* are specially charming, as Sir Henry Wotton, provost of Eton college, pointed out in his letter written to Milton on receipt of a copy of *Comus* from the author, "wherein I should much commend the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a certain Doric delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language *Ipsa mollities*" (It is delicacy itself)

230 **Sweet Echo**—In classical mythology Echo was a nymph who was forbidden by Juno to speak before she was spoken to or to be silent when others spoke to her She fell in love with a beautiful youth called Narcissus but as he did not return her love, she pined away till only her voice was left Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool, and because he could never reach it, he pined away also and was changed into the Narcissus flower **Unseen**—because only a voice



**231 Airy shell**—the atmosphere (*Shell*, perhaps because in old days various musical instruments were made in the form of a shell) The Cambridge MSS have *cell* for *shell*

**232 Meander**—a river in Asia Minor, noted for its circuitous and winding course (hence the verb “to meander”) Different explanations are given of Milton’s reference to this river in connection with Echo, (1) That the course of the river, never returning on itself, is like a repeated Echo (2) That the Meander was associated with music and misfortune *cf.* the story of Marsyas, and the legend of the sorrows of the maiden Byblis seeking her lost brother (3) That the Meander was famous for its swans, whose (supposed) sweet singing before death was a favourite topic of poets **Margent**—margin

**233 Violet-embroidered vale**—valley embroidered with violets —(*i.e.*, the valley decorated with violets as a garment embroidered with coloured silks) *Cf Par Lost IV 700* “Under foot the violet, Crocus and hyacinth with rich inlay *Broidered* the ground” *Violets* were symbols of love and innocence Perhaps a special valley is intended, namely the woodlands to the north west of Athens (“the violet crowned city”) through which the Cephissus flowed, and in which Sophocles was born for Sophocles speaks of Colonus, his birth place, a suburb of Athens, as the haunt of *nightingales* (see next line)

**234 The love-lorn nightingale**—*love lorn* means “forsaken by one’s loved one” *Lorn* (*cf.*, forlorn) and *lost* are cognate words One legend of the nightingale was that a woman called Aedon (Greek for nightingale), having killed her son by mistake, was changed into a nightingale, whose song was supposed to be the lament of the mother for her lost child

*Cf.* Virgil, *Georgics* IV 511 "As the nightingale wailing in the poplar shade plains for her lost young while she weeps the night through, and sitting on a bough, reproduces her piteous melody, and fills the country round with the plants of her sound"

235 **Her sad song mourneth**=sings mournfully her "sad song" (*Song* is a kind of cognate accusative after *mourneth* an intransitive verb) In using the feminine possessive pronoun, *her*, Milton is wrong in his natural history, for it is the male, and not the female, bird that sings

236 **Pair**—her two brothers

237 **Narcissus**—see Note on line 230

238 **Have hid**—not a grammatical mistake for "hast hid," but the Subjunctive mood

240 **Tell me but**—only tell me

241 **Queen of Parley**—*parley* is conversation, talk, (French, *parler*) *cf.* *parlour*, *parliament* etc **Daughter of the sphere**—either born of the atmosphere, her "airy shell," or, drawing her being from the "music of the spheres" *Cf.* Milton's poem, "*At a solemn music*,"—"Sphere born harmonious sisters, voice and verse"

242 **So**—*i e.*, If thou tellest me

243 **And give resounding grace** *etc.*—*i e.*, add the beauty of the echo to the music of the spheres (**Resounding grace**—charm of resonance) (After this line, the Cambridge MS has a stage direction, *Comus looks in and speaks* Lines 244—265, are an "*aside*," which the Lady is not supposed to hear)

244 **Mortal mixture of earth's mould**—any perishable being made of clay *i e.*, any merely human being (Genesis II 7 "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground")

245 **Ravishment**—rapture, ecstasy (the effect upon the hearer put for the cause, *viz*, the Lady's song)

246 **Sure**—adverbially used, *surely* **Something holy**—some holy or divine being **These raptures**—effect for cause again See line 245

247 **Vocal air**—*vocal* is used proleptically (*i e*, with the force of anticipation) The air *becomes vocal* only by means of "these raptures"

248 **His hidden residence**—the divine being within the Lady proves his secret presence in her by these strains of divine music

249 **They**—*i e*, "these raptures," the notes of the Lady's voice **Wings of silence**—silence is compared to a bird which carried the sound to the listener, *i e*, the music sounded sweetly through the silence

250 **Empty-vaulted night**—*i e*, night is compared to a vault (from the appearance of the dome like sky), empty of all sound so, silent night

251—2 **At every fall, etc**—darkness is compared to a bird which covers the earth with its dark wings and which smooths its ruffled plumage because charmed with the music **Fall**—every fall of the notes, cadence **Raven down**—feathers as black as the raven's **It Smiled**—rather an incongruous word, as birds cannot smile, but it simply means, "was pleased" (*It* refers to darkness) However in classical mythology Night is represented as a winged goddess, and Milton may have thought of it so in these lines, and not as a black bird

253 **Circe**—see notes on line 50 **Sirens**—in classical mythology the Sirens have no connection with Circe In the "Odyssey" only two are mentioned They were daughters of the river god Achelous and lived on an island near the rock Scylla off the coast of Sicily, and by their beautiful singing

lured the sailors of passing vessels to destruction Circe's power of singing and enchantment explains Milton's mention of her and the Sirens together

254 **Flowery-kirtled Naides**—i.e., Naides with *kirtles* (gowns) made of flowers The Naides were nymphs who lived in streams and rivers

256 **Sung**—the past tense is properly *sang* but the writers of the 16th and 17th century often used *sung*, a form derived from the passive participle **Prisoned soul**—"prisoned" used proleptically = 'take the soul and make it a prisoner'

257 **Lap it in Elysium**—'transport it to heaven'—'fill it with heavenly joy' *Lap* is a form of wrap (*cf. L' Allegro* 136 "*Lap* me in soft Lydian airs") **Elysium**—the abode of the spirits of the blessed heaven **Scylla**—a dangerous rock off the coast of Sicily on which a heavy surf breaks, and where many ships were wrecked The classical myth was that Scylla was originally a sea nymph, whom Circe changed into a monster surrounded by barking dogs because she was jealous of the love of Glaucus for her In her terror Scylla threw herself into the sea, where she became a monstrous rock surrounded by warring waves

259 **Fell Charybdis**—Charybdis was a dangerous whirlpool on the Sicilian coast, opposite Scylla (Hence the proverb, 'To sail between Scylla and Charybdis' the passage between the two being so narrow that ships in trying to avoid one danger often were wrecked by the other) The legend of Charybdis was that originally it was a woman of that name who was changed into a whirlpool by Zeus for stealing the oxen of Hercules (**Fell**—cruel, dreadful)

260—4 The songs of Circe and the Sirens had an evil effect on the listeners, either soporific ("pleasing slumber"),

or maddening, but the singing of the Lady produces a holy and calming joy in the heart

261 **Robbed it of itself**—*it* = sense (*i e.*, consciousness), that is, deprived the listener of consciousness

262 **Home-felt**—deeply felt, (*cf.* 'a home thrust'—'his words went home')

263 **Sober certainty of waking bliss**—opposite to the unnatural joy produced by the Siren's singing, with its "sweet madness" (instead of "sober certainty"), and "pleasing slumber" (instead of "waking bliss")

264 **Heard**—we should expect "felt" (*delight*) but the verb retains the *cause* of the "delight," *viz.*, the music

265 **Hail, foreign wonder!**—(addressed to the Lady), *i e.*, wonderful stranger

266 **Certain**—adverb (certainly)

267 **Unless the goddess that, etc**—unless *thou be* the goddess that in rural shrine *dwells* here (A Latin construction)

168 **Sylvan**—Sylvanus, god of fields and forests the name is corrupted from Silvan (I at *silva*, a wood)

268—70 **By blest song, etc**—*i e.*, preventing by means of thy blest song the bleak fog from spoiling the growth, etc Meaning that the Lady is the guardian and preserver of the luxuriant forest

(265—270 Note how Comus uses his method of flattery (lines 160—164) to deceive the Lady)

271 **Ill is lost**—'is badly wasted,' (a Latinism)

273 **Not any boast of skill**—'not any desire to shew off my musical skill' **Extreme shift**—last resource (**shift** = an expedient tried in a difficulty, a contrivance)

274 **Severed company**—a condensed expression (example of Synecdoche) = "company separated from me"

277—290 The dialogue, in which question and answer occupy alternate lines, is modelled on the Greek form of dialogue called *stichomythia*, and is very uncommon in English poetry

278 Note the alliteration

279 **Near-usher**—closely attending (An *usher* is a door keeper (from Lat *ostium*, a door), whose duty is to *introduce* (to *usher* in) the guests)

281 **By falsehood etc**—*i e*, did they desert you through treachery, or want of good manners, or for what reason?

283 **All**=altogether

285 **Forestalling**—anticipating (To *forestall* meant literally to buy up goods before they had been displayed on a *stall* in the market, in order to sell again at a higher price “forestalling” was a crime in the Middle Ages, and many laws were passed against it) **Prevented**—the original meaning of *prevent* was simply to go *before* later meaning, to *hinder* Both meanings may be intended here

286 **To hit**—(Gerundial Infin) To guess correctly

287 **Imports their loss etc**—*i e*, apart from the present emergency (caused by the loss of the guides), is the loss of these two companions important to you? Have you any other reason to mourn their loss?

288 **No less, etc**—*i e*, ‘their loss imports no less a matter to me than if I should lose my two brothers’ *i e*, they are my brothers

289 **Were they of manly prime, etc**—*i e*, were they grown up men in the prime of manhood, or only boys?

290 **Hebe**—the goddess of youth a daughter of Jupiter and Juno, and cup bearer of the gods, who was always fair and young

291 **What time**—‘at the time, when’—‘when,’ (a Latinism, common in poetry) **Laboured**—weary with labour

292 **Loose traces**—because no longer drawing the plough, the oxen going home for the night after their work

293 **Swinked hedger**—tired, over come with toil (Anglo Saxon, *swincan*, to toil) A Hedger is a man who prunes the hedges and digs ditches between fields

294 **Mantling**—‘covering’ or ‘cloaking’ (the hill) with its green leaves spreading (To *mantle* is to cover as with a *mantle*, cloak)

297 **Port**—bearing, mien **More than human**—divine like that of gods

298 **Faery vision**—vision as of fairies

299 **The element**—the air (The Greek philosophers spoke of fire, earth, water and air as the four elements, but the air was *the element par excellence*)

300 **Plighted**—*plaited*, interwoven (i.e., the clouds mingled together) **Awe strook**—awe struck (Milton often uses *strook* for *struck*)

303—4 **It were**—subjunctive,=‘it would be’ **Like the path to heaven**, etc i.e., a great pleasure, to help you, etc

305 **Readiest way**—shortest way *Readiest* belongs to the predicate ‘what way would *most readily* bring me, etc?’

309 **Land-pilot**—guide on land, like a pilot at sea

310 **Sure guess of well-practised feet**—the almost certain knowledge of the way, belonging to feet that have frequently trodden it

311 **Each every**—(see line 19) **Alley**—walk or avenue

312 **Dingle**=*dimble*=*dimple*—little *dip*, or depression so a miniature valley **Dell**=dale a valley

313 **Bosky bourn**—a stream whose banks are covered

with bushes, taking *bourne* as the same as *burn*, a stream  
But *bourne*, so spelt, means boundary (**Bosky**=bushy)

314 **Daily walks and ancient neighbourhood**—supply,  
“which are” (in apposition to *lane, valley* etc) **Ancient  
neighbourhood**—*i e*, they have been familiar to me for a  
long time

315 **Stray attendance**—abstract for concrete, = “strayed  
attendants”

316 **Shroud**—*i e*, shrouded (beshrouded) *i e*, hidden,  
sheltered (Milton first wrote, “within these shrouded limits”)

317 **Low-roosted lark**—*i e*, the lark that has roosted  
on the ground

318 **Thatched pallet**—bed made of woven straw or  
grass its nest **Rouse**=awake (intensive) **If other-  
wise**—*i e*, if you decide otherwise—if you would prefer to  
put off the search to to-morrow

320 **Loyal cottage**—*i e*, cottage of a loyal man

322 **Honest-offered**—“honestly offered” (Cf “new  
intrusted,” line 36 and “new enlivened,” line 228)

323 **Sooner**—more readily

324 **Tapestry halls**—halls hung with tapestry (“tapes-  
try” here with adjectival or participial force = tapestried)

325—6 **Where it first was named, etc**—*i e*, ‘*courtesy*,  
although it gets its name from the *court* and is still professed  
there by courtiers and people in high life, is really most often  
found amongst the poor’

327 **Less warranted**—less guaranteed, *i e*, ‘where I  
have less *guarantee* of safety’ (*warrant* and *guarantee* are  
different forms of the same word)

328 **That**—so that

329 **Eye me**—*i e*, look on me, watch over me (To



*eye* a person, now generally means to watch him suspiciously)

**Square**—accommodate, adjust

330 **Proportioned**—used proleptically ‘when the trial is adjusted, the strength as a result will be proportioned to it’  
**Exeunt**—“they go out”, *i.e.*, they leave the stage

STAGE DIRECTION—The two brothers now come on the stage, just vacated by Comus and their sister. They are conversing (Notice the difference in their characters. The elder brother is philosophically calm, and professes to have no fear for his sister because she is protected by her own chastity. The younger is ~~a~~ more matter of fact, and is full of anxiety and fear for the Lady’s safety)

331 **Unmuffle**—uncover yourselves, (to *muffle* is to cover up, *e.g.*, to *muffle* the throat, a *muffled* sound)

332 **Wont’st**—*i.e.*, art wont, taken as the 2nd person sing., present tense, of a verb “to wont” = to be accustomed. But *wont* (or *won ed*) is really the participle of the Middle English verb *wonen*, to dwell or be accustomed, and not an independent verb at all. The fact that it was only a participle was forgotten, and it was treated as a distinct verb, with a new participle of its own, *wonted* (which is really a double form, *won ed ed*).  
**Benison**—blessing

333 **Pale visage**—(*pale* as compared to the sun) *visage*=face, *amber* cloud=golden, yellow coloured cloud (like amber)

334 **Disinherit**—drive out, dispossess (The moon’s light would dispel the confusion caused by the darkness)  
**Chaos**—confusion the name given to the state of things before the creation. Here the darkness of night

335 **Double night, etc**—*i.e.*, the darkness caused by the absence of the sun, and deepened by the shade of the trees

336—40 The construction is irregular, "if your (moon's) influence be dammed up, then (turning from the moon) do thou, gentle taper, visit us," etc

337 **Usurping mists**—the clouds being in wrongful possession of the sky **Taper**—vocative case, the verb being "visit" (thou) **Gentle**—referring to the soft light of the taper

338 **Though a rush-candle**=though (thou be only) a rush candle, (a rush light, the pith of a rush floating in oil and giving when lighted a very dim light, very like a *chiragh*) **Wickerhole**—hole in the wicker work (basket work) wall

339 **Clay habitation**—mud hut

340 **Long levelled rule**—straight horizontal beam of light (rule=ruler the straight piece of wood for drawing straight lines)

341—2 **Star of Arcady, or Tyrian Cynosure**—*i.e.*, the *lode star* **Star of Arcady**=any star in the constellation of the Great Bear, by which the Greek sailors steered **Tyrian Cynosure**=the stars in that part of the Little Bear which was called *Cynosura* ("dog's tail"), and by which Phœnician or Tyrian (of Tyre) sailors steered Hence, "you will be to us our guiding star by which we shall direct our journey, what the Great Bear is to the Greek sailors, or the Little Bear to the Phœnicians." Called *Star of Arcady*, because in Greek mythology the nymph of Arcadia, Callisto, was turned by Zeus into the Great Bear, and her son, Arcas, became the Little Bear *Cynosure* is used in *L' Allegro*, line 80, for *lode star*, so, "point of attraction" "The *Cynosure* of neighbouring eyes"

343 **Barred**—debarred, or barred *from*

344 **Folded flocks**—flocks of sheep put in their *folds*  
**Penned**—fastened (in a pen or sheep fold) **Wattled cots**—  
 enclosures made of huddles, *i e*, frames, or fences of plaited  
 twigs (*wattled*)

345 **Pastoral reed with oaten stops**—*i e*, the shepherd's  
 pipe, at first a row of the hollow stems of oat straw The  
*stops* are the holes over which the player places his fingers to  
 alter the notes (Cf, *Ibydas* 33, "the *oaten* flute")

346 **Whistle from the lodge**—*i e*, whistle of the  
 shepherd to his dog from his hut

347 **Count the night-watches**—by periodically crowing  
**Feathery dames**—hens ("Village cock (to) count etc,"=  
 complex object of "might hear")

349 **Innumeros**—innumerable

350 **Hapless**—unfortunate

351 **Her**—herself (reflexive)

352 **Burs**—burs the prickly seed vessels of such  
 plants as the "burdock" (= burdock), burr thistle etc

355 **Leans**—either (1) intransitive nominative, "head,"  
 or (2) transitive nom, *she*, understood, with "head" as  
 objective **Fraught**—frighted, filled

356 **What if, etc**—*i e*, "what (shall be done) if (she  
 be) in wild amazement, etc"

357 **Direful**—dreadful

358 **Hunger**—by synecdoche for hungry animals  
**Heat**—by synecdoche for lustful and licentious men

359—385 The elder brother (1) rebukes the younger  
 brother for anticipating misfortune, (2) comforts him with  
 the thought that his sister's virtue will protect her, (3) and  
 points out that mere lack of company is no evil to the wise  
 and good

359 **Over-exquisite**—*i e*, too inquisitive (*Exquisite*)

being used here in the sense of inquisitive, curious from Lat *exquiro*, *exquisitum*,—to “carefully seek out”, while *inquisitive* is from Lat *inquiro*, *inquisitum*,—to “seek after” “Exquisite” is now used in the passive, “inquisitive” in the active sense)

360 **To cast the fashion**—to calculate, compute, pre-judge the form

361 **Grant they be so**—*i.e.* let us suppose the evils are as you imagine

362 **What need, etc**—*i.e.* why should a man anticipate his hour of grief? (We may construe either (1) “what (adj) need (noun) is there that”, or (2) “what (adv = why) need (verb)” **Forestall**—see note on line 285

366 Here begins the exposition of the doctrine of Chastity which forms the subject of the whole poem

366 **To seek**—at a loss, wanting (*cf* Bacon, “Men bred in learning are perhaps to *seek* in points of convenience” *Advancement of Learning*)

367 **Unprincipled in virtues book**—*i.e.*, ignorant of, or unacquainted with, the elements of virtue (A “principle” is a fundamental truth, so “unprincipled” = without fundamental truth, so, without fixed rules of life)

368 **The sweet peace**—obj after *in* **Bosoms**—holds within itself

369 **As that, etc**—adverb clause of consequence after ‘unprincipled’ **Single want**—*mere* want want of “light and noise” *only*, (see note line 204)

370 **Not being in danger**—*i.e.*, ‘she not being in danger’ absolute construction

372 **Plight**—condition (probably from Anglo Saxon *pliht*, danger not at all connected with *plight* in line 301)

373 **Virtue could see** *etc*—*cf* lines 381—5 (*Cf* Spenser, *Faerie Queen* I i 12 “virtue gives herself light through darkness for to wade”) *i.e.*, the virtuous person has his own inward light to guide him in the thickest outward darkness

375 **Flat sea**—*cf* I at *aequor*, a flat surface, used of the sea *Lycidas*, line 98, “level brine”

375—80 These lines well describe Milton's own life of studious retirement at Horton, with its purpose of preparation for his life work (see Introduction)

375 **Wisdom's self**—*i.e.*, Wisdom herself the wise man

376 **Seeks to**—applies herself to

377 **Contemplation**—(five syllables) Contemplation fosters the growth of wisdom as a nurse does that of a child

378 **Plumes her feathers**—like a bird *Plume*, or *prune*, used of birds, smoothing or trimming their feathers (*Cf* Pope “when contemplation prunes her ruffled wings”) See Milton's own words, quoted on p 5 of the *Introduction*

379 **Various**—varied **Bustle of resort**—movement and noise of the crowded resorts of men (towns)—*cf* “The busy hum of men,” *L'Allegro*, line 118)

380 **All to-ruffled**—altogether disarranged Milton wrote “all to ruffled,” which has been explained as (1) *all to-ruffled* where *to* is an intensive prefix, and *all* an adverb = quite, altogether (2) *All to ruffled* where *all to* simply means *altogether* (3) *All too ruffled* *i.e.*, altogether too much ruffled Explanation (1) is to be preferred

381 **He that has light**, *etc*—*cf* *Paradise Lost* I 254.

“The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven”

382 **Centre**—*i.e.*, centre of the earth,—a strong expression for utter darkness

- 384 **Benighted**—over taken by the night in darkness
- 385 **His own dungeon**—*cf* *Samson Agonistes* line 156,  
 "Thou art become (O worst imprisonment!)  
 The *dungeon* of thyself"
- 386 **Most affects**—has the greatest liking for
- 389 **Senate-house**—the place where the Roman Senate met was saced
- 391 **Maple dish**—dish made of the wood of the maple tree
- 393 **Hesperian tree**—the tree of Juno which grew in the garden of the Hesperides, the nymphs of the *west* (*Hesperus*), and which was guarded by the sleepless dragon, Iadon
- 394 **Blooming gold**—the tree bore golden apples (or apples?), which it was one of the twelve labours of Hercules to obtain
- 494 **Had need the guard**=would have need of the guard
- 395 **Unenchanted**—superior to all powers of enchantment, not to be enchanted "unenchantable"
- 398 **Unsunned**—not exposed to the sun so, hidden
- 400 **As bid me hope** *etc*—Construction "as (you may) bid me (to) hope (that) Danger will wink on Opportunity and (that Danger will) let a single, etc"
- 401 **Danger will wink on**, *etc*—*i.e.*, danger will connive at, shut its eyes to, in opportunity, (to wink on = wink at, *i.e.*, connive at, refuse to see) *Danger* here=dangerous men, people at whose hands danger is to be expected. Such men, he says, will not refuse an opportunity to injure a helpless maiden. *Cf* *As you like it*—I 3 113 "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold"
- 404 **It recks me not**—*i.e.*, I do not care, or heed an

impersonal use of the old verb *reck* (Anglo Saxon *recan*, to care) cf *Par Lost* IX 173 "I reckon not"

405 **Dog them both**—follow closely upon night and loneliness

406 **Ill-greeting touch**—a touch that greets with an evil, not a good, purpose

407 **Unowned sister**—i.e., "as if unowned," thinking her to be unowned by any one, and so unprotected

409 **Without**—beyond (all doubt)

410—1 **Where event**—i.e., "where the issue depends equally upon circumstances to be dreaded and to be hoped, I incline to hope"—"where the chances in favour of hope and fear are evenly balanced, I hope" **Poise**—balance **Arbitrate the event**—judge the result

413 **Squint suspicion**—squinting suspicion squinting, or look askance or sideways, being an expression of suspicion Cf, Quarles "Heart Gnawing Hatred, and *squint-eyed* suspicion" And Spenser describes suspicion as —

"Foul, ill favoured and grim,  
Under his eyebrows looking still askance"

416—75 This is the most important part of the poem as a clear expression of its main subject, the protective power and supreme worth of purity and it is exceedingly fine poetry One critic (Ross) says of it,—"The speech of the Elder Brother is a kind of hymn in praise of chastity, and is the crowning glory of the poem Criticism must needs cease where everything is faultless—feeling, fancy, and phrase To know it by heart is a perpetual purification of thought"

The argument is briefly, (1) The "hidden strength" referred to (line 415) is chastity, which protects like complete armour (2) The classical stories of Diana's bow and Miner

va's shield are allegorical expressions of the ancients' reverence for chastity (3) God sends his angels to guard and teach the pure minded person, and so spiritualises his body (4) But impurity carnalises the soul, which becomes so materialised as to be unwilling to leave the grave in which its body lies

418—19 I mean that too, *etc* —*i e*, 'she is protected, as you say, by the strength of Heaven, but she has another strength, which, although of course it comes from Heaven, may be called her own, namely, her chastity' (If Heaven gave it—even although Heaven gave it)

421 Complete steel—*i e*, completely armed in steel armour (Cf, St Paul's famous passage, *Galat* 6 10—18)—“put on the whole armour (panoply) of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,” *etc*) “Complete,” accented on the first syllable

422 A quivered nymph—a nymph bearing a quiver of arrows Diana, the goddess of virginity, was armed with bow and arrows Belphebe, the personification of chastity in Spenser's “*Faerie Queen*,” had “at her back a bow and quiver gay”

423 Trace—track, traverse Unharboured—with no shelter a “harbour” meaning a lodging or shelter

424 Infamous—(accented on second syllable) ill famed, having a bad name Perilous—dangerous

425 Sacred rays—*cf*, *sun clad power of chastity*, line 782

426 Bandit or mountaineer—Bandite, or bandit, is from the Italian *Bandito*, which means *banned* or outlawed *Mountaineer*, used in a bad sense here, mountaineers being often wild and lawless

428 Very desolation—real, true, absolute desolation, (*very*, as an idj, being traced to Lat *verus*, true)



429 **Shagged**—rugged or shaggy On *horrid*, see note on line 38

430 **Unblenched**—undaunted, unflinching (*blench* = to cause to *blink*)

431 **Be it not**—provided that it be not (a conditional clause)

433 **In fog or fire, etc**—alluding to the different orders and powers of demons believed in in the Middle Ages—some inhabiting fire, some water, some air, some earth, etc

434 **Blue meagre hag**—a witch, thin and blue looking (starved) **Unlaid ghost**—a disembodied spirit that wandered restless and unpacified To *lay* a ghost was to make it cease from wandering and appearing to living men

435 **Breaks his magic chains, etc**,—the popular superstition was that the ghost could begin to wander at night after curfew time until cock crow in the morning *Curfew* (French, *couvre feu* = fire cover) was the bell rung at 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening as a signal to put out all fires and lights

436 **Goblin**—a kind of fairy, generally evil **Swart faery of the mine**—a gnome, the kind of fairy found in mines and under ground caverns **Swart**—dark (*cf* swarthy) In Scandinavian mythology gnomes were called *Svartalfar*, or black elves

439 **The old Schools of Greece**—the elder brother turns from the mediæval mythology of Northern Europe to the old legends of Greece for confirmation of his argument

440 **Testify the arms**—*ie*, testify to the might of *testify* here is transitive)

441 **Dian**—Diana, the divine huntress, the moon goddess of virginity, said to be invulnerable by the shafts of Cupid ('love)

442 **Silver-shafted queen**—the “silver shafts” of Diana are the white moon beams

443 **Brinded lioness**—brindled or streaked

444 **Spotted mountain-pard**—*leopard*, a panther

445 **Frivolous bolt of Cupid**—*frivolous* applying “to Cupid in his lower character as the wanton god of sensual love, not in his character as the fair Eros who unites all the discordant elements of the Universe” (Bell) See line 1004

447 **Snaky-headed Gorgon shield**—The Gorgons were three horrible monsters with wings, brazen claws and great teeth, and serpents on their heads instead of hair. One of them, Medusa, was slain by Perseus with the help of the gods. He cut off her head, and Minerva (Athene) fastened it in the centre of her shield. Whoever looked at the terrible, snake-crowned face was turned to stone and Minerva used her shield to confound Cupid with this power.

448 **Minerva**—or Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom. She sprang full grown and full armed from the head of Jupiter, to help him in his wars with the giants. She was a virgin goddess, “unconquered virgin”

449 **Freezed**—weak form of past tense, for strong form “froze.” **Congeaed**—used proleptically she froze the stone until it became congealed.

450 **But**—except (preposition) **rigid looks of chaste austerity**—severe looks of a strictly chaste woman

451 **Dashed**—confounded (obsolete meaning)

452 **Blank awe**—the awe of one who is *blank*, i.e., white or pale with amazement or fear. (Cf. “a blank look,” or “he looked blank”)

440–452 The argument is that in the old Greek legends

the *bow* of Diana and the *shield* of Minerva were but allegories for the protecting power of chastity

454 **Sincerely so**—sincerely *chaste*

455 **A thousand liveried angels, etc.**—(*liveried* = dressed in the livery (servant's uniform) of heaven, **lackey** = wait upon, from "lackey" (or lacquey) a footboy, servant) —*ie*, ministering angels attend upon and guard her Cf Psalm 90 "He shall give His angels charge over thee," and *Hebrews* 1 14 "Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation?"—

457 **Dream vision**—"dreams" occur in sleep, and "visions" in the waking state Both were supposed to be means of divine revelation in ancient times (*Vision* is here a trisyllable)

458 **Gross ear**—thick, heavy ear

459 **Oft converse**—frequent communion (*Oft* used as an adjunct) **Heavenly habitants**—inhabitants of heaven

460 **Begin to cast a beam, etc.**—begin to illuminate the body (*Begin*, subjunctive *turns*, (461) indicative, to express certainty)

461 **Temple of the mind**—*ie*, the body Cf St Paul's words, "know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, and which ye have from God?" Cor 6 19 (*Unpolluted*, because belonging to a chaste minded person)

462 **To the soul's essence**—*ie*, a life of purity and spiritual communion with God will spiritualise the body and make it like the soul, and so immortal Cf Raphael's words in *Paradise Lost* V 496—9 —

"And from these corporal nutriments, perhaps,  
Yon bodies may at last turn all to spirit,  
Improved by tract of time, and wing'd ascend  
Ethereal"

463—475 Milton describes the opposite process As the material body may be spiritualised by a pure life, so the soul may be carnalised by an impure life Self discipline exalts the body to the level of the soul, but self indulgence degrades the soul to the level of the body

464 **Unchaste looks**—CHRIST taught that an adulterous look, or even desire, was as sinful as the act of adultery itself “I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart” (*Matt* 5 28)

465 **Most**—above all **Lewd**—originally simply ‘ignorant’ so common, vulgar and then, sensual, licentious, lustful **Lavish act of sin**—sinful acts unrestrained in character and profuse in number

466 **Lets in parts**—*ie*, results in the defilement of the mind, and soul as well as the body

467—9 **The soul grows clotted first being**—*ie*, the pollution infects the soul, and by degrading it to a material and brutish level, destroys its original nature

467 **Clotted by contagion**—*ie*, the soul becomes infected with the pollution that has entered through the material senses, and its ethereal essence becomes coagulated, or solidified, as into a material mass

(**Clot**—akin to “clod” a lump, mass, block to *clot*, to become thick, to coagulate)

468 **Imbodies and imbrutes**—*ie*, becomes materialised and brutish *Imbodies*, generally transitive, is here intransitive *Imbrute* (a word perhaps invented by Milton) is intransitive too in *Par Lost* IX 166 it is transitive

469 **The divine property of her first being**—Plato (*Phædo*) says, “the soul resembles the divine, the body the mortal” And see *Genesis* 2 7 “And the Lord God formed

man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul "

470 **Gloomy shadows damp**—see note, line 207 (note the double adjective)

471 **Charnel-vaults**—burial vaults (Originally French *charnel*, from Lat *carnalis* (carnal) from *caro* (carnis) *flesh*)

473 **As loth, etc**—Construction —“ As (being) loth to leave the body that it loved, and (as having) linked itself,” etc It—rather awkward, as *shadows*, to which by strict syntax it must refer, is plural we must connect it in thought with *soul*, line 467

474 **Sensuality**—Milton's spelling of “sensuality”

475 **Degenerate and degraded**—*degenerate*, because the soul that *embodies* loses its *genus* (spirit), and *degraded* because when it *embrutes* it loses its *grade* (human)

476 **Divine Philosophy**—*i e*, such philosophy as is contained in “the divine volume of Plato,” as Milton called it Plato himself said Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven, its original home, to earth Lines 460—475, are an expression of the doctrine expounded by Plato in his *Phaedo*, in a conversation between Socrates and Cebes

477 **Crabbed**—sour or bitter as in *crab* apple, a wild apple very sour to the taste

478 **Apollo's lute**—Apollo being the god of music (*lute*, a stringed instrument like the guitar)

479 **Nectared sweets**—Nectar was the drink of the gods, as “ambrosia” was their food

480 **Crude surfest**—*crude* means literally raw, undigested, *surfest*, an overloading of the stomach by eating and drinking (The general meaning is that philosophy is like a feast that goes on always yet never results in indigestion)

480 (The Brothers suddenly hear a shout in the distance)

**Li-t** '—listen a form often used in poetry

481 **Hallo**—see note, line 226

482 **Methought**—see note, line 171 **What should it be?** a direct question about a past event, = "what was it likely to be?" See note, line 205

483 **Night-foundered**—benighted lost in the darkness "Founder" (French *fondrer*, from Latin *fundus*, the bottom), means, of ships, to "go to the bottom," to sink The meaning of the expression here is, "swallowed up in the night (as a foundered ship in the sea), and lost"

484 **Neighbour**—here, an adjective

486 **Again, etc**—He hears the hallo again, and this time nearer to them

487 **Best draw**—*i.e.*, we had best draw our swords

488 **He comes well**—*i.e.*, He is welcome (= "well come")

489 **Defence is a good cause, etc**—*i.e.*, in defending ourselves we are engaged in a good cause (*i.e.*, it is right to fight in self defence) and so we may confidently pray, 'may God be on our side!'

**Stage Direction**—the Attendant Spirit comes in clothed like a shepherd named Thyrsis, in the service of the Earl, the father of the two brothers (see lines 84—91)

490 **That hallo**—we must suppose the Attendant Spirit has halloed again just before entering (The edition of *Comus* printed by Lawes 1637 has this note "He hallos, the Guardian Dæmon hallos again, and enters in the habit of a shepherd")—First (1) the Attendant Spirit hallos from a distance (480—1) (2) then he hallos again, nearer (486) (3) then, the elder brother hallos (487) (4) and is answered

by another halloo from the Attendant Spirit, referred to here,  
line 490

491 **You fall, etc**—*i e*, otherwise you will run on our swords

493 **Sure**—adverb (surely) see note, line 246

494 **Thyrsis**—a name common in pastoral poetry These lines (495—512) contain a second compliment to Lawes, like that of lines 86 88 That (86 88) was enforced by alliteration, this by rhyme The introduction of a rhymed passage into blank verse was perhaps meant by Milton to harmonise with the mention of musical lyrics of Lawes ("his madrigal")

494 **Artful**—literally, "full of art" skilful

495 **Huddling**—*i e*, hastening and crowding the waters huddle (crowd) together as they stop in their course to hear **Madrigal**—(*Ital mandra*, a flock) a shepherd's or pastoral song

496 **Sweetened, etc**—*i e*, his music made the flowers even more fragrant (a poetical hyperbole, like that of the previous line) **Musk-rose**—a particular species of rose smelling like musk

497 **Swain**—a common word in pastoral poetry, for a young man Strictly, it means a peasant (Compounds, boat *swain*, cox *swain*)

499 **Wether**—ram (The ram which leads the flock and wears the bell round its neck is called the bell wether) **Pent**—"penned," participle of *to pen*, =shut up in the sheep *pen* (Cf *pin* fold, line 7)

**Forsook**—forsaken (a form of the past tense used for past participle)

501 **His next joy**—*i e*, addressing the second brother, "and thou, his next joy" that is, the son who is a joy to him next to his eldest son and heir his second son

502 **Trivial toy**—common place trifle

503 **Stealth of**—things stolen by (The word now always means the secret and deceptive manner in which a thief *steals* “by stealth” (secretly) “stealthy”)

504 **Fleecy wealth**—flocks of sheep, whose woolly fleeces were wealth to the owners

505 **Downs**—the name given in the south of England to low, undulating grassy hills, used specially as sheep pastures cf Wiltshire Downs, Surrey Downs (Anglo Saxon, *dun*, a hill)

506 **To this my errand, etc**—i.e., in comparison with this errand of mine and the anxiety it caused me (“This my errand,” viz., to rescue the Lady from Comus)

508 **How chance**—“How happens it” **Chance** is here a verb, followed by a noun clause “how does it chance that she is not,” etc

509 **Sadly**—seriously (cf “some *sad* person of known judgment” (Bacon))

510 **Our neglect**—i.e., negligence on our part

511 **Ay me unhappy**—Ah me, unhappy that I am! (*Aj* has no connection with “ay,” meaning “yes” “Ay me” is the French *ay mi*—“alas, for me!”)

512 **Prithee**—*I pray thee*

513 **Ye**—a dative = I’ll tell to you

514 **Shallow ignorance**—So wisdom is called deep, or profound (Cf *superficial* knowledge)

515 **Sage poets**—Homer and Virgil, probably and perhaps Tasso and Spenser

**Taught by the heavenly Muse**—There were nine Muses in classical mythology, who were goddesses, daughters of Zeus, and who presided over the arts and sciences (as history (*Clio*), comedy (*Thalia*) tragedy (*Melpomene*), epic poetry, (*Calliope*) Hence “Muse” is used for “poetic inspiration,” supposed to



come from God Milton himself claimed this poetic inspiration, saying he was "taught by the heavenly Muse" (*Parad Lost*, iii 19)

516 **Storied**—related "To story" is here used actively the past participle is often used in the sense of "bearing a story", cf "storied windows" (*Il Penseroso*, 159) "storied urn" (Gray's *Ekky*, 41)

517 **Chimeras**—the Chimera was a terrible monster (slain by Bellerophon mounted on Pegasus, the flying horse), with a lion's head, dragon's tail, and goat's body, that vomited flame and smoke when it breathed So here, as a common noun, "chimeras" mean monsters Hence a "chimera" comes to mean a wild fancy, an impracticable idea, because we moderns no longer believe in such fabulous creatures as the chimera, and "chimerical" means fanciful, wild **Enchanted isles**—such as the islands of Circe, and Calypso, mentioned in the *Odyssey* Spenser mentions some "wandering islands" in the *Fairy Queen*

518 **Rifted rocks**—riven rocks The Greeks believed the passage to Hades to be a cave in Cape Taenarus, in the south of Greece, through which Orpheus went to rescue his wife Eurydice, the Romans, a cave near Lake Avernus, in Campania

521 **Navel**—centre

522 **Immured**—(literally, "walled in," *murus*, Lat, a wall), enclosed **Cypress**—the cypress tree was and is often planted in cemeteries and graveyards, its foliage being taken as a sign of mourning **Bacchus-Circe-Comus**—See note to line 58, pp 44—45

523 **Witcheries**—enchantments

525 **Baneful**—full of bane (poison)

526 **Murmurs**—spells and incantations were muttered and murmured over each witch's brew or magic potion, when it was being mixed

529 **Unmoulding the face**—*i.e.*, defacing the stamp of reason impressed on the human face. The figure is that of melting down coins in order to re-stamp them. "**Character-ed**" a "character" is literally an engraven or stamped mark, as on a coin. **Unmoulding**—the opposite process to "moulding," *i.e.*, shaping metal by running it molten into a mould. "**Mintage**"=that which is minted or coined. "mint" (akin to "money," from *I* at *moneta*, through Anglo Saxon *minnet*), = the place where money is coined, as a verb, *to coin*

531 **Crofts**—small fields

532 **That brow**—overhang (like the brows of the face). **Bottom glade**—the glade below or, glade in the valley, "bottom" sometimes meaning valley, as in Shakespeare. "Glade" is akin etymologically to "glad," and means literally a *glad* or bright place, a name for an opening or avenue in a dark wood.

533 **Monstrous rout**—rout of monsters (see note on stage direction after line 90)

534. **Stabled wolves**—wolves in their dens, "stable" being used by Milton in the general sense of "abode" (*Cf* Virgil's *Aeneid*, VII, where *Aeneas*, sailing past the island of *Circe*, hears "the growling noise of lions in wrath, and shapes of huge wolves fiercely howling")

535 **Hecate**—see line 135. Here correctly a trisyllable

539 **Unweeting**—unwitting, unknowing (Anglo Saxon *witan*, to know *cf* the *witanagemot*, "meeting of wise men," the royal council of the Saxon kings) (This spelling occurs in Spenser, and Chaucer)

540 **By then**—either (1) "by then" must be understood

as equivalent to "by the time that," and so—"when," the demonstrative adverb implying a relative adverb or, (2) the clause "by then in fold" must be taken as parenthetical

542 **Knot-grass**—a common English wild plant, with knotted stems and small pink flowers

**Dew-besprent**—sprinkled with dew

543 **Sat me down**—"me" is reflexive—*myself*

544 **Canopied and interwove**—covered as with a canopy and interwoven Both words grammatically refer to bank, but in sense only "canopied" can apply to bank, 'interwove' must go with "ivy"

545 **Flaunting**—garish, showy, not a suitable word to apply to the honeysuckle, a climbing shrub with sweet-scented flowers of a delicate pink and yellow colour

547 **To meditate, etc**—to *apply myself to my country music*—i.e., "to sing a pastoral song" or "play on my shepherd's pipe" "To meditate" here does not mean to ponder, but it used in the sense of the Latin *meditor*, "to apply oneself to" The phrase is a Latinism, "To meditate the Muse" being a phrase in Virgil's writings Cf *Lycidas* 66, "And strictly meditate the thankless Muse"

548 **Till fancy had her fill**—i.e., Till my desire for music should be satisfied (*had*=should have) **Ere a close**—i.e., before I finished my song

549 **Wonted**—see note, line 332

550 **Barbarous dissonance**—a noise that made an unpleasant discord with the music

551 **Listened them**—listened to them (the prep "to" after verbs of hearing is often omitted in Shakespeare **Them**—the plural refers (1) to the many sounds that made up the "dissonance," or (2) to the many people who made the "dissonance")

552 **Unusual stop**—referring to what happened at line 230, the Lady's approach

553—4 **Drowsy frightened**—*s e*, drowsy (sleepy) and frightened "Sleep" (or Night) is represented as riding in a closely curtained carriage drawn by horses, which moved slowly and sleepily, but were agitated and frightened by the noise the sudden silence gave them a respite from their fright—In Milton's corrected MS, however, the reading is "*drowsy flighted*" (=flying sleepily), which gives better sense, but which makes it hard to explain in what the "respite" consisted

555 **A soft sound**—referring to the Lady's song, line 230

556 **A steam, etc**—the soft swelling music (appealing to the sense of hearing) compared for its sweetness to perfume (which appeals to the sense of smell)

557 **That even silence displaced**—*s e*, the Lady's song came so softly and sweetly that even silence was taken unawares, and was so charmed that she would have given up her existence altogether, if her place could have been taken for ever by such music

558 **Took—taken Ware—aware**

560 **Still—always All ear**—*s e*, listening intently, (*all*, an attribute of *I*) The idea is that all the other senses were suspended and the whole consciousness concentrated on hearing

561—2 **Create a soul, etc**—*s e*, breathe life even into the dead **Ribs of Death**=a skeleton

565 **Harrowed with grief**—*s e*, torn with grief and fear as by a harrow

566 **Hapless nightingale**—The Lady is compared to a nightingale because she was singing so sweetly at night

568 **Lawns**—open stretch of grassy ground, as generally in Milton In modern English, a “lawn” is a plot of rolled and cut grass in a well kept garden

569 **Often trod by day**—*i e*, which I have often trodden in the day time, and so know well

572 **Certain signs**—see line 644

574 **Aidless**—helpless (an obsolete word). **Wished**—wished for

575 **Such two**—two persons such as she described—of such and such description

577 **Durst**—the old past tense of *dare* *dared* is modern

578—9 **Sprung** = sprang (see note line 256) The language is condensed the meaning is, “I began my flight and continued it until I had found you here” *Had found* is either (1) pluperfect because he looks back in thought after a long speech to the meeting with the brothers or (2) subjunctive,—in which case the meaning is, “I began my flight and determined to continue it until I had (= should have) found you”

581 **Triple knot**—threefold league, “triple alliance” *viz*, Night and Shades (of the wood) and Hell (diabolical magic of Comus)

585 **Safely**—confidently **Period**—sentence.

586 **For me**—*i e*, for my part, as far as I am concerned.

588 **Which erring men call chance**—*erring* must be taken with the predicate, not with “men” “which men, *erring when they do so*, call chance,” or, “which men *erroneously* call,” etc. There is no such thing really as chance, as every effect has its cause, though we may not know what it is Cf Pope, *Essay on Man*, 1 290

“All nature is but art, unknown to thee,

All chance, direction which thou can’st not see”

588 **This**—referring to what follows “this, namely, that virtue may be assailed,” etc (The construction is, “I hold this belief, *viz*, that, etc, in the face of (or as against) the threats, etc’

589—90 That is, the virtuous person may be attacked and tried by evil influences, but he can never be really or permanently injured by them Cf Christ’s words to his disciples,—“Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul” (*Matt* 10 28) **Enthralled**—enslaved (*thrall*, a slave)

591 **Even that which Mischief, etc**—*i e*, even that which the evil power intended to be most harmful

592 **Happy trial**—a trial which ends happily (*i e*, in victory)

**Most glory**—the source of greatest glory (*Cf James*, 1 2 “Count it all joy, my brother, when ye fall into manifold temptations (trials), knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience ” and St Paul, *2 Cor* 4 17, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory ” In the whole of this passage 584 99, Milton adds the teachings of Christianity to those of philosophy in support of his doctrine of chastity “It exhibits the sublimest sentiments of the Christian Religion here gave energy to the poet’s strains ” (Todd)

593 **Recoil**—spring back (like a steel spring) *i e*, the evil devices of bad men will return upon themselves to their own destruction

594—7 **And mix self-consumed**—*i e*, evil will not permanently be mixed up with good it will gradually be separated, like the scum and dross which rises to the surface of molten metal and leaves the metal pure, then, settled on itself, it will prey on itself till it is consumed

597 **Self-fed and self-consumed** : *e*, —supplying its own self as fuel which will be consumed by its own fire **This—** : *e*, this belief, what I have said about the ultimate triumph of virtue

598 **Pillared firmament**—the ancients regarded the sky as a solid dome supported at the horizon on pillars resting on the flat earth

**Firmament**—what is *firm* (I at *firmamentum*, from *firmus*, fixed) the sky, heavens **Rottenness**—Abstract for concrete, —a rotten structure

599 **And Earth's stubble**—: *e*, the foundations of the earth are as weak as straw (The general meaning is, that the speaker is as certain of the truth of his moral philosophy as of the stability of the heavens and solidity of the earth, if this moral truth is a lie, then the universe can fall to pieces) **Let's on**—let us go on (to rescue the Lady)

600—1 **Against lifted up**—: *e*, “May I never fight for a cause which is against the will of God and against which His power is ranged” **Just sword**—sword dedicated to fight in only just causes

602 **For that girt**—: *e*, as regards even though he be surrounded

603, **Grisly**—allied to *gruesome*, causing horror, terrible **Legions**—a trisyllable here, =le gions

604 **Acheron**—one of the rivers of Hell and used often for Hell itself, here personified (*Sooty*—black as soot)

605 **Harpies**—(lit spoilers) were foul monsters, with the bodies of birds and heads of women **Hydras**—(Gk *hydra*, water), monstrous water snakes the most famous was a nine-headed one, slain by Hercules

606 **Africa and Ind**—(India), which, being very little

known to Europeans in ancient times, were thought to be the home of all kinds of marvels

607 **Return his purchase back**—*i e*, give up his spoil, “release his new got prey” ‘Purchase’ now means some thing *bought* but formerly was used also of something obtained in any way, by *foul* means or fair (such as stolen, or taken by force) it literally means something eagerly *pursued*  
**Return back**—tautology

608 **Curls**—considered in Milton’s time as a mark of a voluptuary and worn generally by courtiers (hence the cavalier’s sneering nickname for the Puritans, “Roundheads,” because they cut their hair short)

609 **Cursed as his life**—*i e*, his death will be as cursed (disgraceful) as his life

609 **Venturous**—ready to venture

610 **Yet**—nevertheless *i e*, in spite of the fact that in this case it is useless **Emprise**—old form of “enterprise” Literally, = what is undertaken, “so” readiness to undertake, “daring”

611 **Can do thee little stead** —*i e*, can give thee little help *Stead*, literally “position,” occurs now only in a few phrases (as, “to stand in good stead”), and in composition *steadfast*, *instead*, *homestead*, etc

612 **Far other**—*i e*, very different

615 **Unthread**—loosen

616 **Crumble**—lit to break into *crumbs*, like bread to break up into small pieces **Prithee**—=I pray thee

617 **As to make this relation**—*i e*, as to be able to tell us this—*relate* this to us **Utmost shifts**—the most extreme plans or devices which I can imagine

619 **A certain shepherd lad**—supposed to refer to Charles Diodati (see *Introduction*, “Life of Milton”), a dear



friend of Milton, at whose death in 1638 Milton wrote his *Epitaphium Damonis*. He addressed his 1st and 6th elegies to him. In the *Ep. Dam.* he thus describes his medical and botanical skill —

“ I here thou shalt cull me simples, and shalt teach  
Thy friend the name and healing powers of each ”

(*Cowper's Translation*)

620 **Of small regard to see to**—*ie*, not much to look at his physical appearance was not imposing (*Cf* English Bible, 1 Sam 16 12 “goodly to look to”)

621 **Virtuous plant**—*ie*, plant of (healing) power

623 **Beg me sing**=beg me to sing

625 **Even to ecstasy**—*ie*, till he went into raptures (*Ecstasy* (Greek) literally means, “standing out of oneself”—being “beside oneself” *Cf* “transport” carried over, “rapture” (seizure), and our English “to be carried away” with excitement)

626 **Scrip**—wallet, leather bag **Requital**—reward, acknowledgment

627 **Simples**—medicinal herbs “Simple” (*Lat simplicem*, “one fold,” not compound) was the name of a single ingredient in medicine, so, applied to a herb used as a drug

629 **Faculties**—qualities and functions as medicines

630 **Me**—*ie*, for me ethical dative **Culled**—picked selected

633 **Bore**—the subject, grammatically, is “leaf”, but we must understand “plant”

634 **Unknown, and like esteemed**—*ie*, ‘esteemed as much as it is known,’ *viz*, not at all known and esteemed to a like extent, *ie*, not at all

635 **Clouted shoon**—patched shoes “Shoon,” an old

plural of "shoe," like *eyen* (eves), *hosen* (of *hose*), *dohtren* (daughters) etc "Clouted" means (1) patched, or (2) with a plate of metal attached to the soles in either case, heavy and clumsy

636 **More med'einal**—more medicinal, with greater healing power—Scan the line thus, "And yet / more med / cinal is / it than / that Mo / ly" **Moly**—the plant given by Hermes (Mercury) to Ulysses when he was approaching Circe's island, as an antidote to her spells (*Odyssey* Y 280) Hermes says "She will mix thee a potion, and cast drugs into the mess, but not even so shall she be able to enchant thee, so helpful is this charmed herb that I shall give thee" Therewith the slayer of Argos gave me the plant that he had plucked from the ground, and shewed me the growth thereof It was black at the root, but the flower was like milk *Moly* the gods call it, but it is hard for mortal man to dig, howbeit with the gods all things are possible" (*Butcher and Lang's* translation) Roger Ascham (in his *Scholemaster*,) refers to the Moly, and gives a spiritual meaning to it which is in harmony with what Milton symbolised by his "Hæmony" "The true medicine against the enchantment of Circe, the vanity of licentious pleasure, the enticements of all sin, is in Homer the herb Moly, with black root and white flower, sour at first, but sweet in the end, which Hesiod termeth the study of virtue, hard and irksome in the beginning, but in the end easy and pleasant And that which is most to be marvelled at, the divine poet Homer saith plainly that this medicine against sin is not found by man, but given and taught by God"

637 **Wise Ulysses**—Ulysses, king of Ithaca, whose wanderings and adventures after the Trojan war, in which he

had fought, is the subject of Homer's *Odyssey* **Hermes**, Mercury, the messenger of Zeus (Jupiter)

638 **He called it Hæmony**—*He*=the shepherd lad of line 619 Both the name and the plant, Hæmony, are inventions of Milton The name he derives from "Hæmonian," an adjective that had the sense of "magical" in classical poetry It literally meant "Ihessalian," *Hæmonia* being an old name for Ihessaly, which was regarded as a land of magic So *Hæmony* means the "magical plant"—Milton probably symbolises by this plant, which has power against the spell of Comus (sensuality in its most plausible and attractive form), the pursuit of virtue (See quotation from Ascham in previous note) Coleridge conjectured that the prickles of the plant (line 631) signified the trials of the Christian life, and its "bright golden flower" (633), its triumph and joy

639 **Sovran**—sovereign (See note line 41)

640 **Mildew blast**—a wind (generally the dry East wind) supposed to be favourable to the growth of mildew, (a kind of blight—*Anglo Saxon meledeaw*, honey dew) on plants

641 **Furies**—Terrible spirits called up by magic (Among the Greeks, the Furies were the ministers of vengeance)

642 **Pursed it up, etc**—*i e*, put it in my purse, or wallet, but thought little of it—did not attach much importance to it *Cf Lycidas*, 116 "Of other care they little reckoning made"

643 **Till now that**—*i e*, "till now *when*"

646—7 **Entered came off**—*i e*, 'I penetrated into the very midst of his treacherous enchantments, and yet escaped in safety' **Lime-twigs**, =branches covered with a sticky substance called "bird lime" for catching birds The metaphor is of a bird getting right in to the snares of the fowler, and yet escaping

649 **Necromancer**—sorcerer, wizard literally, one who can by magic commune with the dead (Greek, *nēkros*, dead)

650 **Where if he be**—“and if he be *there*”, a (Latinism)

651 **Brandished blade**—sword held or waved in the air Cf. *Hermes*, advice to Ulysses “When it shall be that Circe smites thee with her long wand, even then draw thy sharp sword from thy thigh, and spring on her as eager to slay her,” (*Odyssey* X) **Break his glass**—So in the *Faery Queen*, Sir Guyon breaks the golden cup of the enchantress, Excess (I 12 56)

652 **Luscious**—delicious (from *lustious*, old English *lust*, pleasure)

653 **But seize his wand**—see lines 815 19

654 **Menace high**—fierce threat (Cf. *high* wind, *high* hand, *high* descent)

655 **Sons of Vulcan**—when pursued by Hercules, Cacus, the son of Vulcan (god of fire), “Vomited from his throat huge volumes of smoke” *Æneid* VIII 252)

658 **Bear**—subjunctive used optatively “*may* some good angel *bear*”

### Second Scene

STAGE DIRECTION—The story of the Lady, broken off at line 330, is now resumed. Comus has got the Lady in his power and now throws off all disguise: instead of the humble cottage (line 320) he has taken her to his magical palace, and appears in his true colours as Comus, the Enchanter. But he has so far got power only over the body of the Lady: her mind is still free, and it is to subdue this that he exerts all the fascination of his spells and the attractions of sensual pleasure (“all manner of deliciousness,”) and the speciousness of his

arguments Here the interest of the poem comes to a climax Sensual pleasure, in the form of Comus, is pitted against Virtue, in the form of the Lady, and the argument between the two gives Milton the opportunity of a noble exposition and defence of the cause of purity and self control

**Deliciousness**—delightful things *Such as* "soft music etc" "*The Lady* (appears) *set in*, etc **Puts by**—refuses **Goes about**—tries

659 **But**—only, merely

660 **Your nerves alabaster**—*i.e.*, turned to stone, petrified "Alabaster," a kind of fine marble "*Are chained*" the present tense (instead of future) after conditional a clause expresses the instantaneous and certain action of the spell

661 **Or as Daphne was**—construction, 'If I but wave this wand, you (become) a marble statue, or (you become) root bound, as Daphne was, that fled from Apollo' Daphne was an Arcadian goddess who was pursued by Apollo she prayed for help to escape from him and was changed into a laurel tree (Greek, *daphne*) Hence the laurel was sacred to Apollo and supposed to be his favourite tree

662 **Fled Apollo**—*i.e.*, fled from Apollo The verb is sometimes used transitively *cf* lines 829, ("fly the mad pursuit"), 939 ("Let us fly this cursed place")

665 **Corporal rind**—*i.e.*, the body, which is like a thick skin round the mind

666 **Immanacled**—chained, fettered, (to "immanacle" not now used, though "to manacle" is from 'manacle,' a fetter for the wrist, a handcuff (Latin *manus*, the hand))

**While Heaven sees good**—*i.e.*, only as long as God permits

668 **Here be all**—*be* is indicative see line 12

669 **Fancy can beget on youthful thoughts**, etc — *i.e.*, 'that the imagination can suggest to the mind of youth,

when the blood is young and circulates in the veins as quickly as flowers open in Spring'

671 **The April buds**—buds that open in April In **primrose season**—when the primroses are flowering i.e., the spring time

672 **Cordial julep**—heart reviving drink *Julep*, Persian *gulab*, rose water *Cordial*, lit., hearty (Lat *cor*, *cordis*, the heart)

673 **His**=its (See line 96) **Crystal bounds**—cup made of crystal or glass that holds it

674 **Syrups**—from, Arabian *sharab*, wine

675—6 **Not that Nepenthes**, etc—Nepenthes (Greek, *ne*, not, and *penthos*, grief so, "sorrow dispelling") was the name of a wonderful drug given by Polydamna, the wife of Thon, an Egyptian, to the beautiful Helen, the cause of the Trojan war, who was said to be the daughter of Jupiter and Leda. It is described in the *Odyssey* as "a drug to lull all pain and anger, and bring forgetfulness of every sorrow. Whoso should drink a draught thereof, when it is mingled in the bowl, on that day he would let no tear fall down his cheek, not though his father and mother died" (IV 222—233, Butcher and Lang's Translation)

677 **Is of such power**, etc—Construction **Nepenthes** is not of such power to stir up joy as this julep is, nor is it so friendly to life, nor so cool' etc

679—689 The argument is—'Nature has given you a beautiful person, not absolutely, but on certain conditions, one of the most important of which is, that you should keep it in health by taking the necessary refreshment after toil. But, by refusing this restoring drink which I offer you, and so neglecting your body, you are, like a dishonest borrower, cheating Nature, your creditor'

682 **Covenants of her trust**—conditions of her loan

683 **Ill-borrower**—dishonest borrower

685 **Unexempt condition**—*i.e.*, the condition from which no one is exempt a law of human nature, binding on all at all times, (*viz.*, *refreshment after toil*, etc.)

686 **Mortal frailty**—abstract for concrete “frail mortals”

688 **That have been tired**—*That*, antecedent *you* line 682 (‘You that have been tired, etc., invert the covenants,’ etc.)

689 **Timely**—seasonable

690 **This**—*viz.*, the julep

693 **Was**—*sing.*, because “cottage and safe abode” convey an idea, compound subject *Past tense*, because referring to the past act of telling

695 **Oughly-headed**—so spelt in Milton’s MS., = *ugly-headed*

696 **Brewed enchantments**—potions that have been brewed under magical incantations

698 **With vizored falsehood**, *etc.*—*i.e.*, disguised treachery (A *visor* is a mask, “a false face”) Referring to the innocent looking disguise of a shepherd which Comus had assumed (line 166) to conceal his true character **Base forgery**—“Forgery” in its general sense of ‘counterfeiting,’ ‘fabricating,’ “producing falsely to deceive” In modern English it has the special meaning of counterfeiting a person’s signature for the purpose of fraud

700 **Liquorish balts**—(on *bait*, see line 162) **Liquorish**=*lickerish*, *i.e.*, appetising, causing one to *lick* one’s lips in anticipation of the feast (No connection with *liquorice* (=licorice=Lat. *glycyrrhiza*, a plant with a sweet root)

701 **A draught for Juno**—*etc.*, a draught fit for Juno, the Queen of Heaven

702 **Treasonous offer**—*etc.*, the drink you offer so treasonably *Offer* = thing offered

**Treasonous**—(obsolete), = treasonable

703 **Good men good things**—*Cf.* Luripides, *Medea* (618) "the gifts of the bad man are without profit"

704 **That which is not good, etc.**—The idea is from Plato who (in the *Republic* IV 439), says that the soul has a rational principle and an irrational, and when the rational controls the irrational the soul desires only that which is good

706—755 The specious reasoning of Comus on behalf of sensual indulgence and against the Lady's doctrine of abstinence has two main points (1) Nature provides good things in abundance for our gratification evidently intending we should enjoy them if we refuse to use them, (a) we shall be guilty of base ingratitude to the All-giver, and (b) Nature will be suffocated with her wasted abundance (lines 706—786) (2) Beauty one of Nature's greatest gifts, was given to afford pleasure, both to its possessor, and to others, and must therefore be circulated and used, like money, not hoarded and hidden

707 **Budge doctors of the Stoic fur**—*etc.*, "Those morose and rigid teachers of abstinence and mortification who wear the gown of the Stoic Philosophy" (Warton) **Budge** = (1) lambskin with the wool turned outwards, worn as the lining of the hoods of bachelors of arts, *etc.*, so, a mark of scholastic attainments (2) adj., "surlly," "stiff," "formal," (Johnson's Dictionary), "solemn," like a learned doctor in his academic robes Both meanings may be meant here, hence 'solemn,



formal doctors wearing their robes lined with budge fur' **Of the Stoic fur**—of the school of the Stoics (*fur*, here like *budge*, meaning the fur lined academic hoods the special "budge" worn by the doctors referred to was that which marked the Stoics) **Stoic**—The Stoic School of Philosophy was founded by Zeno about 308 B.C. It got its name from the fact that he lectured in the "*Stoa Poikile*" (Painted *Porch*) at Athens. He taught that men should cultivate self-repression of, and studied indifference to, pleasure and pain, so as to free themselves from all passion and follow virtue. Hence Stoicism stands for ascetic self-control. The opposite school of Philosophy was the Epicurean, which taught that happiness could be attained only by the cultivation (not repression) of the senses and the pleasure they can give.

708 **The Cynic tub**—The reference is to Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher, who to shew his contempt for all comfort and luxury, lived in a tub. The Cynical School of Philosophy preceded the Stoics in Greece. The Cynics held pleasure and the enjoyment of the senses in contempt, and taught asceticism. The name Cynic (Greek *kynos*, canine, like a dog, curish) was given them on account of their 'snarling' temper and 'snapping' disposition. Hence a "cynic" means now a misanthrope, a sneering fault-finder.

709 **The lean and fallow Abstinence**—so called because abstinence makes man thin and pale. **The**—used here generically.

711 **Unwithdrawing**—ungrudging. Nature gives lavishly, and does not take back her gifts.

714 **All to please, etc**—*all*=entirely. **Sate**—satisfy. **Curious**—careful, anxious, and so "fastidious."

715 **And set**—supply. **She** (*viz.*, Nature). **Worms**—

silkworms (the larvæ of certain moths, which spin for themselves cocoons from which silk is obtained)

716 **Green shops**—the leaves of the mulberry tree on which the silk worms feed (The silk worms are compared to spinners and weavers working in their shops)

717 **To deck**—Gerundial infinitive, of purpose **Her sons**—men

718 **Her own loins**—*ie*, in the bowels of the earth

719 **Hutched**—stored up, enclosed *Hutch* meant a chest now used chiefly in the compound *rabbit hutch* **All worshipped ore**—gold, worshipped and desired by all

720 **To store her children with**—*ie*, wherewith to provide for or supply her children (*viz*, men)

721 **Pet of temperance**—*ie*, sudden and temporary fit of abstinence **Pulse**—leguminous plants, such as beans and peas so, generally, vegetables (A reference to Daniel, the Hebrew prophet and his companions, who, when captives at the court of Babylon, refused the delicate food of the palace, and lived on pulse and water (See *Daniel* 1 12))

722 **Frieze**—coarse woollen cloth

723 **The All-giver**—Greek *Pandora*, a word applied to the Earth as the source of all riches Probably *Comus* means God, as he was quite capable of using religious arguments if they suited his purpose

724 **Not half despised**—*ie*, 'men would be ignorant of half the good gifts God has provided, and yet would despise them' To despise what he does not know is the mark of a fool

725—6 **As a grudging master**, etc —*ie*, 'and we should serve him (God) as if he was a grudging master and as if he was a penurious niggard, etc, and we should live like, etc,—(Cf, in Christ's parable of the "Talents," the slothful servant's

excuse in reply to his good master's rebuke for his idleness, 'Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow and gathering where thou didst not scatter' (*Matt* 25 24) *To grudge*—to grant with reluctance **Penurious**—poverty stricken **Niggard**—a mean, stingy person a miser

727 **Nature's bastards sons**—A bastard (illegitimate child) cannot inherit his father's estate, not being, in the eye of the law, a legal son at all For the comparison between illegitimate and legitimate sons, *cf* Bible, *Hebrews* 12 8 "If ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons"

728 **Who**—antecedent, Nature (*ie*, the sons of her who) **Surcharged**—overloaded

729 **Strangled**—suffocated **Waste fertility**—wasted fertility *ie*, the products of her fertility, which would be wasted because unused

730 **Cumbered**—*ie*, (*would be*) cumbered (So, (*would be*) darked) **Winged air darked with plumes**—*ie*, the air being full of flying birds, would be darkened by their feathers

731 **Over-multitude their lords**—*ie*, out number their masters, *viz*, men

732 **O'er-fraught**—overladen (freighted) *ie*, the sea would become so over full of fish as to increase in bulk

732—736 **And the unsought diamonds brows**—These lines are somewhat obscure in meaning, and at best very extravagant in fancy The general idea is that if men did not eagerly seek after diamonds they would become so numerous as to give light like the sun But diamonds do not multiply like animals and birds Moreover, it is hard to see what connection diamonds have with the sea, and why

they should "emblaze" and "bestud with stars" "the forehead of the deep" Also to whom does "they below" refer? The fishes in the sea? If the reference to the "deep" were not there, we might take it as a description of the way in which the blaze of diamonds would illuminate the subterranean caverns of the earth, where they might naturally be found (Milton's M, S has "bestud the centre with their starlight," centre = centre of earth)

733 **Emb'aze**—make to blaze, make splendid

735 **Inured**—literally, "hardened," so, less sensitive, accustomed to

737 **Coy**—reserved, shy **Cozened**—cheated, beguiled (A cozener was one who claimed *cousin* ship or relationship with another so, one who tries to deceive by flattery)

739—755 **Beauty is Nature's coin**, etc.—The idea of this passage is common in poetry, and may be found in Spenser, Fletcher, Drayton, Daniel, Shakespeare, etc See especially the first six of Shakespeare's "Sonnets" *Construction*—"Beauty is Nature's coin (inasmuch as) it must not be hoarded," etc That is, beauty is compared to coined money in this particular respect, that neither are meant to be kept unused

741—2 **Mutual itself**—i.e., beauty brings no pleasure when kept to itself by its possessor, but only when mutually enjoyed with another **Unsavoury**, etc—i.e., if it is kept by its possessor selfishly, unshared with others, it will cease to give any pleasure (become unsavoury)

743 **Let slip time**—allow time to slip i.e., if you miss the opportunity

744 **It**=beauty **Languished**—languishing

745 **Nature's brag**—Nature's boast what nature is proud of

748 **Homely features home**—A play on the words *Homely* here means plain, without beauty *Keep home*=keep at home

749 **Their name thence**—*i.e.*, the word “homely” is derived from “home”

750 **Of sorry grain**—of poor or indifferent colour *Grain* is often used by Milton for colour it is from Lat *granum*, a seed, hence any small object, especially the cochineal insect, which yields a crimson dye hence, *colour* in general **Ply**—plait, knit or weave

751 **Sampler**—sample or pattern piece of needle work **Tease the huswife's wool**—‘*comb or card the housewife's wool*’ (To *tease* is, literally, to pull apart the fibres of a substance as flax or wool, with a toothed comb like instrument Hence the fuller's thistle is called the Teasel, or Teazel, because its flower heads or burrs, being covered with little hook like bracts, were used to raise the nap of woollen cloth)

752 **Vermeil-tinctured lips**—*i.e.*, lips coloured vermilion *Vermeil* is the French spelling of “vermilion” (red), which is from Lat *vermis*, a worm, *viz* the cochineal insect (See note on line 750)

753 **Tresses like the morn**—Homer speaks of the fair tressed Dawn’ (Odyssey V 390)

754 ‘Nature gave you your beauty for another purpose, think what that purpose is, and as you are only young, allow me to advise you’

756—61 These lines are an aside, not addressed to Comus

757 **But that**—*i.e.*, ‘were it not that’ or, ‘but I see that’—

758 **As mine eyes**—*i.e.*, ‘as he has already charmed my eyes’

759 **False rules pranked in reason's garb**—*i.e.*, specious, plausible arguments on behalf of evil *Pranked*=decked in a showy manner

760 **Bolt**—=to sift, separate (a *bolting mill* separates the meal from the bran) so, to bring forward refined arguments,—to set forth arguments with careful discrimination

761 **Check her pride**—*i.e.*, reprove her insolence by answering her arguments

762 **Impostor**!—Here she speaks directly to Comus, lines 762—79 contain the Lady's reply to the plausible argument of Comus it is, that if those who live according to the laws of temperance had only a moderate share of the superabundance possessed by the few who live in luxury, the blessings of Nature would be fully used, and the Giver would receive true gratitude for the greedy glutton cannot be truly grateful A better distribution of the world's wealth would deprive Comus' argument of all its plausibility She closes (lines 779—799) by shewing how impossible it is to explain the doctrine of virginity to the sensualist, who must be left to his sensual pleasure

763—4 **As if she would, etc**—*i.e.*, as if she wished her children to use her abundant gifts for extravagant luxury **Cateress**—stewardess, provider To *cater* means to provide with food—from *cafes*, provisions

765 **Means to the good**—intends for the good

766 **Sober laws**—laws that teach sobriety

767 **Spare Temperance**—temperance must be taken in its general sense of *self control*, moderation

768 **Beseeming**—suitable (*Cf* "seemly")

770 **Lewdly pampered** Luxury—wickedly gluttonous luxury

772 **Dispensed**—distributed

774 **And she no whit encumbered**, etc —: *e*, and Nature would not be at all surcharged or overburdened' *No whit* = not a particle not in the least, (adverb)

776 **His praise due paid**—: *e*, his praise being duly paid  
**Gluttony** = gluttonous man (abstract for concrete)

772 **Crams**—: *e*, crams himself, (*cf feed, change, prepare*, etc —all verbs which can be used reflexively without having the pronoun expressed) **Blasphemes his Feeder**— curses the God who provides him with his feast

780 **Enow**—enough

780—99 "A recurrence by the sister, with much more mystic fervour, to the Platonic and Miltonic doctrine which had already been propounded by the Elder Brother (lines 420 75)" (Masson)

780—1 **Dares arm** = dares to arm

782 **Sun-clad power of chastity**—: *e*, chastity is enveloped with a pure light which is so powerful as to dazzle presumptuous eyes *Cf* Spenser (*Faerie Queen* iii 6) who says of Belphebe, the personification of chastity, "And Phoebus with fair beams did her adorn" See line 425, "the sacred rays of Chastity" (*Cf* Revelation, XII 1 "And a great sign was seen in heaven, a woman arrayed with the sun"—typifying Christianity, or the Christian Church)

783 **Yet to what end?** Rhetorical question, = it would be to no end (purpose) it would be useless

784 **Nor nor** = neither, nor

785 **Sublime notion and high mystery**—In his "Apology for Smectymnus" Milton says he learnt "abstracted sublimities" of Chastity and Love from Plato, and from the Bible "these chaste and high mysteries, with timeless care infused, that the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body"

788 **Thou art worthy**, etc — *te*, thou deservest (in a bad sense) not to know, etc — *te*, thou dost not deserve to know

789 **This thy present lot** — *te*, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, incapable of high spiritual things

790 **Your dear wit** — *your*, sarcastically used **Dear** — used in contempt (*cf* the use of "precious" 'he is a precious fool,' *etc.*) so — 'your precious wit' **Gay rhetoric** — here, in contempt, as the instrument of sophistry

791 **Dazzling fence** — brilliant defence, or argumentation

792 Note the biting sarcasm

793 **Uncontrolled worth** — unlimited, infinite worthiness

794 **My rapt spirits** — "Rapt" = enraptured, as if the mind or soul were *carried out of itself* (Lat *raptus*, seized)

795 **Flame of sacred vehemence** — *te*, such a holy enthusiasm

797 **The brute earth**, etc — *te*, the senseless earth would become sensitive and give me her assistance, ("lend her nerves" to me)

798 **All thy magic structures** — specious and plausible arguments

799 **Were** = would be

800 — 806 — (An aside)

800 **She fables not** — *te*, she speaks the truth (Note alliteration of the line) "I do fear *that* her words *are* set off (supported, inspired) by form superior power"

802 **Though not mortal** — *te*, though I am not mortal **Shuddering dew** — an instance of transferred epithet, or hypallage it is Comus who shudders and is covered with the cold sweat (dew) of fear



803 **Dips me all o'er**—*ie*, moistens me all over as if I had been *dipped* in water

804—5 **Speak thunder crew**—*Speaks*, Zeugma, referring both to *thunder* and *chains* (unless "speaks" be taken in the sense of 'denounces') A reference to the *Titanomachia*, the war between Zeus and the Titans, when Zeus with his thunder and lightning cast the Titans, whose leader was Saturn, or Kronos, into Erebus, the deepest Hell

805 **I must dissemble**—*ie*, I must conceal my feelings

806 **Come, no more**!—Comus addresses the Lady again *Come*, let me have *no more* of your foolish talk!

807 **Mere moral babble**—*ie*, mere nonsensical talk on morality

808 **Canon laws of our foundation**—*ie*, the established rules of our society "A humorous application of the language of universities and other foundations" (Keightley) ("Our foundation"—*ie*, the society of Comus and his rout)

809 **'Tis but the lees**, *et* —(*Less* and *settlings* = dregs) *ie*, your opinions are due to the black humours which have affected your mind! The allusion is to the old medical theory that the temperament of a man was formed by the mingling of the four primary humours of the body, *viz*, blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy *Melancholy* Greek, "melancholia," = black bile Cf Nash's *Terrors of the Night* (1594), ("Melancholy) sinketh down to the botton like the lees of wine, corrupteth the blood, and is the cause of lunacy"

811 **Straight**—*ie*, immediately

813 **Beyond the bliss of dreams**—*ie*, beyond the happiness that men dream of

*Stage Direction*, Describes the rescue of the Lady by the Brothers, which, however, is not complete, as they allow Comus to escape with his magic wand The Lady is saved, but being

physically still under the magic spell of the Enchanter, she must be completely delivered by other supernatural means

814 **Scape**—escape

816 **Without his rod reversed**—a Latin construction see line 48 and note

817 **Backward mutters**—(*Mutters*—murmurings) spells muttered backwards It was commonly supposed that the waving of a magic wand in the opposite direction and the saying of a spell backwards would undo the influence of a charm

819 **In stony fetters**, etc —*ie*, rendered incapable of movement by a paralysing spell

820 **Bethink me**—*me*, reflexive

822 **Melibœus**—The name of a shepherd in Virgil's *Eclogues* Probably Milton means Spenser, because (1) the story of Sabina is found in the *Faerie Queen* (ii 10, 14), and Milton follows this version rather than that which occurs in the writing of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Sackville, Drayton, and Warner, (2) he calls him a 'shepherd,' *ie*, a poet, (3) and "soohest shepherd, etc" a description which well applies to so eminent a poet as Spenser

823 **Soohest shepherd**—*ie*, truest poet (*Cf for sooth*, = of a truth, *soothsav*=lit, to say truth)

824 **From hence**—the "from" is superfluous, as *hence* is derived from the Anglo Saxon *heonan*, in which *an*=suffix "from" "Not far from hence," Ludlow Castle, the seat of the Earl of Bridgwater, was near the river Severn

825 **With moist curb**—*moist*, because Sabrina was a river deity

826—41 **Sabrina**—The Latin form of the name of the river *Severn* She was the water nymph that ruled the Severn, and is introduced here by Milton in compliment to his patron

and audience, who were naturally interested in the neighbourhood and its legends. The legend of the nymph Sabrina is told in slightly varying forms by several old authors, Geoffrey of Monmouth in particular. The story in brief is that Iocrine, one of the three sons among whom the legendary Trojan hero Brute divided his new kingdom of Albion at his death, married Guendolen, daughter of Corineus, king of Cornwall, but secretly loved Extrilidis, the daughter of a king in Germany, whom he had captured from an army of Huns whose invasion he had defeated. When Corineus was dead, Iocrine divorced Guendolen and openly lived with Extrilidis, by whom he had a beautiful daughter called Sabra (Sabrina). Guendolen gathered an army and fought a battle against Iocrine, in which Iocrine was killed. And then, according to one version, she threw Sabra and her mother Extrilidis into the river, according to another, Sabra threw herself in to escape Guendolen's vengeance. The river was called *Sabrina* (Severn) after her, and she was supposed to rule it as its goddess.

826 **A virgin pure**—hence, likely to be interested in the rescue of a pure maiden from the foul spells of Comus. (See lines 855-7)

827 **Whilom**—*lit* "at the time," of old (Obsolete)

830 **Step-dame**—*i.e.*, step mother. Strictly, a "step child" is the child of a parent who has remarried, the second wife or husband being called its step mother or step father. (*Step* (Anglo-Saxon *Steop*) = "orphaned") So the epithet is scarcely correct here, as Guendolen was the divorced wife of Iocrine.

831 **Commended**, etc.—committed her beautiful innocent self to the keeping of the flood, *i.e.*, threw herself into the river.

832 **That stayed her flight**, etc —'e, that hindered her escape by flowing across her path (*His*=its)

834 **Pearled wrists**—:e, wrists adorned with bracelets of pearls (Pearls were found in the Severn)

835 **Aged Nereus Hall** :e, the abode of Nereus, viz, the bottom of the sea Nereus, an ocean deity, the father of the nymphs called the Nereids, described by the Greeks as the wise and unerring old man of the sea (Note the curious mingling of old British legend and classical mythology)

136 **Piteous of**—full of pity for **Reared her lank head**—:e, raised her drooping (*lank*, lit, slender, so "weak") head

837 **Imbathe**=bathe in

838 **In nectared lavers**, etc —:e, baths sweetened with nectar (see line 479) and scented with asphodel flowers **Asphodel**=the "daffodil," both words being from the Greek *asphodelis* (Middle English *affodille*) It is a bulbous plant of the lily family, bearing a yellow trumpet shaped flower

839 **Through the porch and inlet of each sense**—:e, through each sense, which was a porch and inlet into the inner being of Sabrina **Porch**=gate Cf *Hamlet* 1 5 63 "The porches of mine ear" Bunyan in his Holy War, makes the five senses the gates of his city of Mansoul (allegory for the human soul), such as "Eye gate," "Ear gate," "Feel gate," etc

840 **Ambrosial oils**—heavenly oils, oils of heavenly fragrance or healing virtue (See note to line 16)

841 **Immortal change**—:e, a change that made her immortal (Cf line 10)

842 **Made goddess**, etc — participial construction, common in Latin, (*being made*) It is equivalent to an explanatory clause

844 **Twilight meadows**—*i.e.*, meadows darkened with the approach of evening So,—she visits the meadows at twilight

845 **Helping all urchin blasts**—*i.e.*, remedying or preventing (*cf.* 'I cannot *help* it,' *i.e.*, prevent it 'it cannot be *helped* *i.e.*, remedied) the blighting influence of evil spirits **Blast**=blight **Urchin** is strictly the hedgehog, but it also means a "goblin," hedgehogs being much dreaded and supposed to be the body which wicked fairies sometimes assumed **Ill-luck signs**—signs of bad luck, inauspicious omens (*cf.* 'Midsummer Night's Dream' ii. 1. 32-56)

841 **Shrewd**—*i.e.*, *shrewed*, malicious like a shrew (*Cf.* the verb *beshrew*, to curse)

847 **Vialed**—contained in vials or phials (bottles)

849 **Loud**—adverb ("carol loudly")

851 **Garland wreaths**—Tautological a wreath is a garland Perhaps, "wreathed garlands" *cf.* "twisted braids," line 862 (They threw the garlands into the stream as offerings of gratitude to its goddess)

850 **"Pansies, pinks and gaudy daffodils"**—English flowers **"Pansy"**—the heart's ease, from French *pensee* "thought" (*cf.* 'pensive') **Pink**—the carnation, from Danish *pinken* to wink, twinkle with the eyes, from the eye-like spots on the pink flowers (hence the name of the colour "pink") **Gaudy daffodils**—"gaudy" seems an inappropriate epithet for a modest pale yellow flower, (gaudy="showy, tastelessly or gaudily adorned")

852 **Old swain**—*i.e.*, Melibœus (line 862) Masson however, points out that "neither Geoffrey of Monmouth nor Spenser has this development of the legend"

853 **Clasping charm**—*i.e.*, spell that holds her fast (See lines 660 and 819)

854 **Right**—adverb, “rightly”

857 **Hard-besetting need**—*i.e.*, danger that hems her closely in, or presses hard upon her *Cf* Bible, *Heb* 12 1 “The sin which doth so easily beset us”) **This**—*viz.*, to invoke her rightly in song

858 **Adjuring verse**—*lo* adjure is to command by something sacred This adjuration is contained in 867 889

*Song*—see note on line 230 (Notice the change of metre, the lighter measure being suited to a musical accompaniment, and a favourite with Ben Jonson and other masque writers)

863 **Amber-dropping hair**—(See line 333 and 106) *i.e.*, hair dropping amber *Amber*, a mineralized pale yellow resin of extinct pine trees, valued as jewellery, etc., so called from its resemblance to *ambergris*, a substance obtained from the spermaceti whale and used in perfumery So “amber dropping” expresses the golden colour and sweet fragrance of the hair Masson explains it as, “hair of amber (luminous yellow), colour with the water drops falling through it” Verity says that Sabrina’s yellow locks symbolise the colour of the river waves

865 **Silver lake**—the Severn

867—89 The invocation, which according to Milton’s MS, was “to be said” and not sung after the solo by Lawes (839 66) But from the Bridgewater MS, which has “to sing or not,” it seems it was musically recited by Lawes and the Two Brothers—In these lines Milton has gathered together the names of a godly company of the sea and river deities of classical mythology

818 **Great oceanus**—the constantly flowing river which, as the ancients supposed, surrounded the flat disc of the earth,

was called Oceanus, and the god of this, son of Heaven and Earth, husband of Tethys, and father of all river gods and water nymphs, was called by the same name

869 **Earth-shaking Neptune's mace**—i.e., the trident (see note line 27) of Poseidon (Neptune) Homer (*Iliad* XII 27) calls him "earth shaking," perhaps referring to the thundering surf on the shore

870 **Tethys**—wife of Oceanus, mother of the Oceanids and river gods called by Hesiod "venerable," and by Ovid "the hoary"

871 **Hoary Nereus'**—see note on line 835

872 **Carpathian wizard's hook**—Proteus, a marine deity who had the power of assuming different shapes (hence the adjective, "protean") He was Neptune's shepherd (hence his "hook"), and tended "the monstrous herds of loathly sea calves" (*Odyssey* IV 385-463) **Wizard**, divine because according to Virgil (*Georgics* IV 387) "All things are known to him, those which are, those which have been, and those which drag their length through the advancing future"

873 **Scaly Triton's shell**—Trumpeter of Neptune who blew his "wreathed horn" (see Wordsworth's Sonnet) or "winding shell" to calm the waves As the lower part of his body was in the form of a fish, he is called "scaly"

874 **Glaucus**—a fisherman of Bœotia, who was changed into a sea god and regarded as an oracle by sailors **Sooth-saying**—lit "speaking truth" meaning, foretelling the future, predicting

875 **Leucothea**—Ino, daughter of Cadmus, who threw herself into the sea with her child Melisertes in her arms, to escape the rage of her husband, Athamas She was changed

into a sea goddess by Neptune under the name of Leucothea (the "white goddess"), hence, "lovely hands"

876 **Her son**—Melisertes, who was deified at the same time, called Palæmon by the Greeks, and Portumnus (the "god of harbours,"—hence, "rules the strands") by the Romans

877 **Thetis**—daughter of Nereus, wife of Peleus, and mother of Achilles. She is called by Homer and classical writers "silver footed," which became her "permanent epithet." Milton changes this into "tinsel slippered feet"—an epithet that Trench ("English Past and Present") calls a "poem in miniature", "It brings up," he says, "the flash of the waters." *Tinsel* is cloth worked with silver or gold, and so which glitters and scintillates

878—80 **Sirens Parthenope's Ligea's comb**—see note on line 253. The three Sirens were Parthenope, Ligea and Lucosia. "Parthenope's dear tomb" was at Naples. "**Ligea's comb**"—mermaids were generally provided with a comb wherewith to comb out their hair. Virgil (Georgics IV 336) describes Ligea as a sea nymph.

881—882 **Wherewith**—*with which* goes with *sleeking*, (proper construction 'with which she sleeks her locks, seated on rocks' i.e., "**sleeking locks**" is the true adj. clause, and "**sits rocks**" the true participial clause.

**Diamond rocks**—either (1) very hard rocks "adamant" (which is the same word as diamond) or (2) rocks glittering and gleaming like diamonds because wet with the waves, or (3) as all this is fabulous and impossible, rocks actually made of or studded with diamonds (in harmony with her "*golden comb*").

882 **Sleeking**—making sleek or glossy. **Alluring locks**—hair so beautiful that it attracts or allures the gayer.



885 **Heave**—raise Cf *L'Allegro* 145 "Orpheus' self may heave his head" (*Heaven* is the *heaved up* place)

886 **Coral-paven**—paved with coral the bottom of the sea (or river)

887 **Bridle in**—restrain, check (as a horse)

888 **Answered have**—subjunctive after *if*

STAGE DIRECTION—"Sabrina rises" Cf Stage direction at the beginning of the Masque,—“Attendant spirit descends” This would be managed by machinery and a trap door in the stage

890 **Rushy fringed**—fringed with rushes We should expect “rush fringed” This form may be explained as a participle formed from the compound noun, “rushy-fringe”

891 **Grows**—sing verb, to be taken with each nominative separately (The suggestion that osiers are the branches of willows, and that we may read “willow with its osiers dank,” seems forced and unlikely) The *osier* is a species of willow, whose lithe branches are used for basket making **Dank**—damp (willows and osiers always grow in marshy place or on the banks of streams)

892 **Sliding chariot**—boat gliding smoothly over the water

893 **Thick set green**—i.e., thickly inlaid with agate and beautified with the azure sheen of turquoise (*Set* contains thus, a zeugma) **Azurn**—an adjective, perhaps coined by Milton, from azure, (blue) The old adjectival ending *en* (=mode of) has now almost dropped out of use, but *oaten* (345), *leathern* (626), *cedarn*=made of cedar (990), occur in this poem In modern English we use the noun as an adjective e.g., “a leather belt” (not, leathern belt), “azure sky” (for azurn sky), etc **Sheen**—brightness.

894 **Turkis**—turquoise (also spelt, turquois and turkoise) a blue stone, so called because it came through Turkey from Persia (The "lapis lazuli")

895 **Channel**—river (Severn)

897 **Printless feet**—feet that leave no foot prints

898 **Cowslip's velvet head**—*Cowslip*, a wild English yellow flower of the primrose family *Velvet* is an appropriate description of the soft woolly surface of the flower

899 **Bends not**—because the tread is so light (Cf Shakespeare, (*Venus and Adonis*, 1028), "The grass stoops not, she treads on it so light")

902 Note that the Attendant Spirit continues the rhymes of Sabrina's song ("dear" with "here," "distressed" with "request"), and again Sabrina continues the rhymes of the Spirit's song ("best" with "distressed")

904 **Charmed band**—*ie*, the charm that binds her

908 **Office best**—*ie*, the office or work I like best

910 **Brightest**—Milton originally wrote "virtuous"

913 **Of precious cure**—*ie*, of valuable curative power  
Construction—"Drops of precious cure which I have kept from my fountain pure"

914 **Thrice**—"Three" was a magical number (being "perfect unity," as nine was perfect trinity) Sprinkling with water or blood was a universally recognised means or sign of purification or disenchantment

916 **Next**—adv modifying "touch" **Venomed seat**—poisoned, so enchanted, chair

917 **Glutinous**—gummy, *sticky* Transferred epithet, it is the gums that are glutinous and heated

919 **His hold**=its

921 **Amphitrite**—Queen of Neptune and goddess of the

923 **Anchises' line**—see note, line 827 **Lochrine**, the father of Sabrina, was the son of Brutus, the son of Silvius, the grandson of Æneas, the son of old Anchises of Troy (The old British legend, for which, needless to say, there is not the slightest historical basis, was that Brutus (from which name was fancifully derived "Britain"), the descendant of the Trojan Æneas, conquered Albion (the old name of Britain), and was the ancestor of the British race. The story is told in the ancient poem, Layamon's "Brut")

924—25 —**May miss**—optative, (so (may) scorch, (may) fill, may roll, may be crowned)

924—27 *ie*, may the tributaries of the Severn never fail to fill it with their due supplies of water

925 **Brimmed**—*ie*, brimming full to the brim

928 **Singed**—scorched *ie*, scorching

929 **Never scorch thy tresses fair**—*ie*, dropping the metaphor, "never dry up thy waters"

930 **October**—when the Autumn rains begin, is often a very wet month in England

931 **Molten crystal**—*ie*, pure water, as clear as crystal

933 **Beryl**—a variety of emerald. In the vision of the New Jerusalem in the Book of the Revelation, *beryl* is one of the foundation stones of the city (*Bible Rev* 21 20) **Golden ore**—there actually are gold mines in Wales

934—7 **May thy lofty head cinnamon**—the exact meaning of these lines is rather obscure. The construction is probably "May thy lofty head be crowned round with many a tower and terrace, and here and there (may thy lofty head be crowned) with groves of myrrh and cinnamon (growing) upon thy banks". The confusion arises from the fact that Sabrina means both a *goddess* (conceived as in the from

of a beautiful woman) and a *river*. The words "lofty head" and "crowned" bring up the image of a woman wearing a crown on her head while "tower and terrace," "banks," "groves of myrrh and cinnamon" bring up the image of the literal river, with buildings and trees on its banks. The general meaning, however, is clear enough—that the valley of the Severn may be populous and fertile and rich.

934—5 **Head be crowned with tower and terrace** *etc*—recalling the figure of the castellated crown often placed by artists and sculptors on the heads of allegorical figures of towns, *etc*

937 **Myrrh and cinnamon**—both trees yielding valuable spices. *Myrrh* (Lat and Greek *Myrrha*, Arabic, *murr*, "bitter"), a shrub of Arabia yielding an aromatic gum, used in medicine, *etc*. **Cinnamon**—(Hebrew, *Kinnamon*), a tree of the laurel family, native of Ceylon, the inner bark of which when dried and prepared is used for seasoning foods, *etc* (Urdu, *darchini*)

(Of course some of the blessings on the Severn, prayed for in this passage, are purely poetical, beryl and myrrh and cinnamon being no products of Wales. The whole passage, however, is simply a prayer for prosperity for the Severn valley, and must have pleased the audience. Masson remarks, "The whole of this poetic blessing on the Severn and its neighbourhood, involving the wish of what we should call 'solid commercial prosperity,' would go to the heart of the assemblage at Ludlow.")

937 Stage direction in the Bridgewater M S, at this point—*Songs ends*

938 **Lends us grace**—gives us His favour or mercy (In Biblical language "the grace of God" means (1) the favour

of God towards man (2) then, the spiritual strength in the heart that is a result of that favour)

942 **Not a waste, etc—*sc***, 'let there not be any unnecessary noise made until,' etc

945 **Gloomy covert wide**—(note the double adj, see note line 207), *sc*, the extended and gloomy shade of the forest (Apparently, they are leaving Comus' palace and preparing to escape through the wood)

947 **Your Father's residence**—Ludlow castle, the seat of the Earl of Bridgewater

948—949 **Are met many a friend**—note the sing subject with plur verb

949 **Gratulate, etc—*sc***, congratulate (him on) his wished (for) presence

950 **And beside**—and (where) besides

952 **Jigs**—lively dances

956 **The stars grow high—*sc***, are approaching the meridian, showing the night is late

957 **'It is midnight'**

### Scene Third.

STAGE DIRECTION—The wood and enchanted palace at night, give place to the town and castle of Ludlow in broad daylight. Country people are dancing on the stage. Then come in the Attendant Spirit and the Earl's children

958 **Enough your play—*sc***, we have had enough of your country dances, which must now give way to "other trappings," *viz*, more courtly and refined dancing

959 **Sunshine holiday**—Cf L'Allegro 97—8

"When young and old come forth to play

On a sunshine holiday"

960 **Here be**—=here are (indicative). **Without duck**

**or nod**—*ie*, without the clumsy duckings and noddings of the head, the awkward bowing and curtsying of the rough, untrained country people in their dancing, (*ie*, this other dancing will have the graceful movements of trained and refined dancers)

961—2 **Other trippings lighter toes court guise**—words describing the graceful dancing of the Lady and her brothers (Cf *L'Allegro* 33 “trip it, as you go, on the light fantastic toe”) **Court guise**—*ie*, courtly mien

963 **Mercury** (Hermes)—the messenger of the gods He had wings on his ankles, and was the personification of agility and refinement (*Mercury*, the metal is so called because of its rapid movement when spilled (so, “quicksilver”) Hence adjective “mercurial,”=like the god Mercury, *ie*, brisk, lively flighty, gay, fickle)

964 **Mincing Dryades**—The Dryads were wood nymphs **Mincing**=tripping with short steps ‘Mincing’ has often the idea of affectation, a “mincing accent” being a way of speaking that affects extreme delicacy and refinement of pronunciation (To *mince*=lit to cut into fine, small pieces)

965 **Lawns leas**—On *lawn* see note, line 568 A *lea* is a meadow

**STAGE DIRECTION**—Lawes, in singing this song, probably directly addressed the Earl and Countess of Bridgewater in the audience

967 **Ye**—=you see line 216

968 **So goodly grown**—*ie*, grown so goodly (adj) = handsome)

969 **Three fair branches**—a common name for children, branches of the parent tree

970 **Timely**—here an adverb (“seasonably”—at a fitting time)

972 **Assays**—trials, temptations, (the word is now used of testing metals)

973 **Crown of deathless praise**—see note on line 9 (the garland of the victorious athlete)

974—5 These lines express the moral of the whole poem  
 SPACE DIRECTION — The *Spirit epiloguizes*—i.e., sings or recites an epilogue, or conclusion to the masque, corresponding to the prologue at the beginning This epilogue, by contrasting true heavenly love with sensual earthly pleasure, enforces the moral teaching of the whole poem

976 **To the ocean, etc** —Note the likeness of this song in rhyme and rhythm, to that of Ariel in the *Tempest* (V 1 88 94—"Where the bee sucks")

977 **Happy climes**—i.e., the heavenly regions the land of the blessed

978 **Day never shuts his eye**—"the eye of day"—the sun so, where the sun ever shines (Cf Bible Rev 22 5 "there shall be night no more")

980 **Suck the liquid air**—i.e., inhale the sweet and pure air (*Liquid* is often applied to the air in the figurative sense of limpid, clear, pure)

981 **All**—adv qualifying the following prepositional phrase

982—3 **Of Hesperus, etc**—See note, line 393 The three daughters of Hesperus ("the west," and so "evening"), brother of Atlas, were Aegle, Cynthia and Hesperia They were called the Hesperides, and in their garden, guarded by a dragon, grew the tree that bore the golden apples which Hercules secured **Golden tree**—tree bearing the golden apples *Ovid (Met IV)* calls the tree itself golden)

984 **Crisped shades**—*Crisped*=curled The expression

is a common one in the poetry of the time It really applies to the foliage of the trees which cast the shade

985 **Spruce**—gay neat

985 **The Graces**—Daughters of Zeus, and goddesses who increased and ennobled life's pleasures There were three—Aglaiā (the light one), Euphrosyne (the light hearted one), and Thalia (the blooming one) **Rosy-bosomed Hours**—The Hours (Horæ) were the goddesses of the Seasons The course of the seasons was sometimes called the dance of the Hours

989 **Musky wing**—i.e., wing scented with musk—(breath laden with fragrance)

990 **Cedarn alleys**—avenues of cedar trees For *cedarn* see note line 893

991 **Nard and cassia**—Two aromatic plants *Nard* (Persian word) is the same as spikenard, yielding a fragrant unguent (Cf Bible *Mark* XIV 3 “an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very costly”) **Cassia**—(Hebrew and Phœnician word), a tropical leguminous plant, the leaflets of some species of which constitute the drug called “Senna (Cf Bible, Psalms 45 8 “all thy garments smell of myrrh aloes and cassia”)

992 **Iris**—goddess of the Rainbow (see line 83) **Humid bow**—the rainbow, humid because formed by the sunlight on the falling *rain*

993 **Blow**—here with an active force=cause to blow, or blossom

995 **Her purfled scarf**—i.e., the rainbow, which looks like a ribbon or scarf of many colours **Purfled**=having an embroidered edge (Old French *pourfiler* to *purfle* is still found in the contracted form to *purl*,=to reverse stitches in



knitting and it is akin to *profile*, for both words are ultimately derived from the Latin *pro* (before) and *filum* (a thread (or line))

996 **Drenches with Elysian dew**—*ie*, Iris soaks beds of hyacinth, etc., with heavenly moisture

997 **If your ears be true**—*ie*, pure because the Spirit is about to speak of the nature of true love which cannot be understood by "the gross unpurged ear" (*Arcades*, line 73) He symbolises pure love by Venus and Adonis (992 1002), but shews that above even that is the heavenly love symbolised by Cupid and Psyche (1003—1011)

998 **Hyacinth**—the flower that was supposed to spring from the blood of Hyacinthus, the friend of Apollo

999 **Adonis**—Adonis was a beautiful youth who was loved by Venus. He was killed while hunting by a wild boar, to Venus' excessive sorrow. Her grief was so great that the gods allowed him to spend six months of the year on the earth, (an allegory of the revival of Nature in the spring and of its death in the winter). The story is probably of Phœnician origin, Adonis being identified with Iammuz, mourned yearly by Syrian women

1002 **Assyrian queen**—*ie*, Venus whose worship came originally from the East. She is probably the Roman version of Astarte, called by the Jews Ashteroth, who was worshipped with licentious rites. Astarte, however, was more a Syrian than an Assyrian goddess

1000—1003 **But far above advanced**—These words should be taken together "Cupid advanced far above," (*ie*, far above even pure sexual love is the spiritual, heavenly love only possible to chastity) **Spangled sheen**—*ie*, glittering brightness

1004—5 **Celestial Cupid his dear Psyche**—The myth of Cupid and Psyche is as follows Cupid, god of love and son of Venus, loved Psyche (the human soul) He warned her she must not try to find out who he was, but she was curious, and came to look at him when he was asleep A drop of hot oil fell on him from the lamp she was holding, and Cupid awoke and fled Psyche wandered from place to place seeking her celestial lover and enduring much persecution from Venus, though secretly supported by Cupid At last Jove pitied her and made her immortal, and she was united to Cupid as his bride for ever “In this story Psyche represents the human soul, which is disciplined and purified by earthly misfortune and so fitted for the enjoyment of true happiness in heaven” (Bell) Milton thus opposes high spiritual and mystical love to the parody of it advocated by Comus, which is mere lust, and even to the ordinary sexual love typified by Venus and Adonis “Celestial Cupid,” with his Psyche, is a very different being to the wanton god of sensual love, the Cupid with his “frivolous bolt” of line 445

1005 **Sweet entranced**—(*sweet*, adverb) *i.e.*, in a state of delicious rapture

1007 **Among**—prep governing gods

1008 **Make**—subjunctive after *till* nominative, “consent”

1010 **Blissful**—blessed

1012 **But now my task is smoothly done**—*i.e.*, “now (that) my task, etc, I can fly etc” (adverbial clause) **My task**—alluded to in line 18 •**Smoothly done**—safely and satisfactorily completed

1014 **Green earth's end**—to the ancients, just beyond the straits of Gibraltar was the end of the world

1015 **Bowed welkin**, etc,—i.e., where, at the horizon, the arched sky seems gradually to slope down towards the earth **Bowed welkin**=welkin curved like a bow **Welkin**—the sky, vault of heaven (from Anglo Saxon *wolcun*, “clouds” so, region of clouds)

1017 **Corners of the moon**—i.e., the horns of the crescent moon

1018—23 These concluding lines sum up the whole moral of the poem, which is —If you would be truly free, if you would rise to the highest perfection and bliss, then follow virtue and if in your attempt to follow you feel your weakness, God Himself will stoop to help

1019 **She alone is free**—True freedom is not to be able to do what we like, but what we *ought* The attempt to do merely what we like ends in slavery to our lower nature (*Cf Bible, John 8 34* “Every one that committeth sin is the bond slave of sin”)

1021 **Sphery chime**—music of the spheres “Higher than the sphery chime” is the Empyrean or true Heaven—the abode of God and the blessed So Milton teaches that virtue will lead us into the very presence of God (*Cf Christ's words, (Matt 6)* “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”)

1022 “A triumphant expression of that confidence in the invincibleness of virtue when aided by Divine Providence, and therefore a fitting conclusion of the whole masque” (Bell)

Milton wrote these two lines in the album of a Neapolitan refugee, named Cerdogni, when he was at Geneva on June 10 1639 and beneath them he put,

“Cælum non animum muto dum trans mare curro”  
Joannes Miltonius, Anglus

The Latin means "When I cross the sea, I change the sky, but not my mind " implying that in whatever place or circumstances, he would remain faithful to the doctrine of virtue expressed in these concluding lines of Comus

END

















